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CORONATION STORY see page 68

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

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EQMM SPECIAL

CORONATION STORY — *Lillian de la Torre* — 68

SUSPENSE NOVELETTE

CINDERELLA AND THE MOB — *Cornell Woolrich* — 119

DETECTIVE STORIES

IF A BODY . . . — *A. H. Z. Carr* — 3

MRRRAR! — *Edgar Pangborn* — 21

THE QUIGLEY LIBRARIAN — *Robert Lewis* — 65

THE AUTOMOBILE GAME — *Michael Gilbert* — 89

MOLLY, THE PRIVATE EYEFUL — *Dick Ashbaugh* — 96

CALENDAR GIRL — *Lawrence G. Blochman* — 104

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

'BYE, 'BYE, DARLING — *John L. Hayward* — 25

THE FIX — *Norman Katkov* — 36

CRIME STORIES

THE NEIGHBORS — *John Galsworthy* — 46

RIEN NE VA PLUS — *Alexander Woollcott* — 51

TOWN WITHOUT A STRAIGHT MAN — *Will Stanton* — 53

EQMM "FIRST"

THE McGREGOR AFFAIR — *Sidney Rowland* — 81

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY — *Robert P. Mills* — 94

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IT'S SMART TO READ MYSTERIES
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**From TIME, July 7, 1952.*

IVOR BROWN

associate editor of the London Observer on detective story reading

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New York Times Book Review, February 18, 1951

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

Last month, in our preface to Stanley Ellin's "The Betrayers," which also won a Second Prize in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest, we said that "all the writers we have ever known (at least, all of them with a spark of 'romance' in their creative souls) have had a compulsion to do a story based on the theme of chivalry — perhaps for no other reason than to prove, in modern terms, that chivalry is not dead." A. H. Z. Carr is another who is no exception. But he expresses the wish somewhat differently. To Mr. Carr, the young woman caught in one of life's traps has always seemed a particularly forlorn and touching figure. Mr. Carr has long wanted to write a detective story in which the trap was so strong, so tight, so lethal, that it would provide a powerful test of character for the enmeshed woman and an equally powerful test of insight for the man who tries to save her. "If a Body . . ." is just such a detective story.

And that wasn't all that inspired Mr. Carr to write this most unusual tale. All his life he has been attracted to the tour-de-force type of story — or, to express it another way, to the kind of story which uses the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and character. For example: Mr. Carr has long had the ambition to write a detective story in which the entire plot was developed — and resolved! — in a single room and in a single conversation between two people. A fascinating challenge — one that would dismay and dismantle most writers! But you will discover that Mr. Carr met the challenge with courage and imagination, and the result is one of the most interesting stories we have brought to you in a long time . . .

IF A BODY . . .

by A. H. Z. CARR

THE GUARD UNLOCKED THE DOOR of the cell and said, "Visitor." At the curt word, the girl's listless body came alive, and energy flowed back into her like a tide. Eagerly she got to her feet, smoothing the black tailored suit that had not yet been exchanged for prison garb, and she said, "Is it my lawyer? Mr. de Groot?"

"Don't know," said the guard. "This way."

He led her to the end of the cellblock, where another guard was waiting, and said, "Take her away."

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The stark, rigid lines of the narrow corridor stretched ahead like a perspective of fate. To the guard walking at her side the girl repeated her question. "Is it a Mr. de Groot?"

"Nope. Name of Mount. The warden's office said it was O.K. for him to see you private. In here."

He opened a door, the upper half of which was a glass panel, but the girl stopped short. "I — I'd rather not —"

The guard said, "O.K. by me. No law says you got to see him. Want to go back?"

While she hesitated, a tall young man, with a dark head of arresting boldness and animation of feature, came into view in the bleak room beyond the door. "Beth!" he said. "Beth, my dear."

Reluctantly, then, she advanced into the room, furnished only with a plain wooden table and a few chairs. The guard said, "You know the rules, Mister? You sit on that side of the table. She sits over here. Don't try to touch her or pass her anything. I'll be watching. When you want out, signal, and I'll open the door. You got half an hour."

As the guard went out, Mount said, "I can't believe this has happened."

Her effort to command her voice made it tight and low. "Peter," she said, "you should not have come here. There is nothing you can do."

He seemed not to have heard her. "When I heard the news on the radio this morning I thought I was having a bad dream. It still doesn't seem possible."

"I don't want to talk about it!"

The growing stridency of her voice made him pause, to let her regain composure. "I had to come," he said. "I have a terrible sense of responsibility about last night. If I hadn't played the fool — if I had kept my self-control — all this might not have —"

"Stop, Peter! It's no use."

"Beth, listen to me." His voice was heavy with concern under its clipped and precise enunciation, and his expressive face crinkled in sympathy. "You need help. The District Attorney is moving fast. Did you know you are to be arraigned this afternoon?"

"Yes," she said. "I know."

"Beth. I had to pull wires to get in to see you. I talked with my lawyer, Jim Oliphant. He's a good man, and a friend of Coleman, the District Attorney. He said he would do the best he could for you, if you wanted him."

"I already have a lawyer." Anxiously, she glanced toward the door, where the guard's face, distorted by the flawed glass, peered in like a gargoyle's.

Mount said urgently, "Beth, this is bitterly painful for me, and I can't bear to think what it must be for you. But you must face it. It's clear you were — not yourself when you shot him. After all, you had been — both of us had been drinking. You were in a highly emotional state. Oliphant thought that if you plead temporary insanity — it's just the usual phrase, of course — and throw yourself on the mercy of the court, Coleman might be willing to accept that. Temporary in-

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sanity would explain everything. If Coleman went along — and Oliphant might be able to help there — you could spare yourself all the horrors of a long trial, and get off with a comparatively light sentence."

She stared at him, fighting down a surge of anger, but finally it burst out in whirling words. "How nice that would be for you, Peter! You would not have to testify. No scandal. Everything fixed neatly. Your reputation unsmirched. Only a few years for me to spend in some state institution. How kind, how helpful you are!"

The lash of her tone did not shake his air of solicitude. "Beth, I won't pretend I hadn't thought of that. But believe me, that's not why I came here. I'm trying to find a way out for you."

"I'm sorry," she said, slowly. "I suppose you are. But understand this, Peter. I'll try not to drag you into this — but I'm not going to plead guilty."

That startled him. "But you confessed!"

She pressed her fingers against her temples, and closed her eyes for a moment. When she opened them, she said, "I can't talk to you any more, Peter. Please go now. Please!"

"Beth!" He stretched out a hand. "If my testimony can help you in any way — I don't know how, but if it can, don't spare me."

She inclined her head, in acknowledgment of his words, but did not speak or look at him; and he picked up his hat and moved toward the door. The guard opened it, saying to Beth, "Through already? O.K. You got another one. Your lawyer, this time: Mr. de Groot."

"Thank God," she said. "Are we to talk in here?"

"Yeah. This is him coming now."

Mount said huskily, "Goodbye, Beth. Remember what I said." After an instant, during which he waited for a reply that did not come, he picked up his hat and went away.

De Groot, a big, loose-jointed man in the thirties, with a pugnacious, unsmiling face and intensely blue eyes, glanced at Mount curiously as they passed each other in the doorway. When the guard had gone out, he waved Beth to a chair and sat down across the table. "This may take a while," he said, without preamble. "How are you holding up?"

"I'm all right."

He studied her. A wide mouth, dark gray eyes now deeply circled by sleeplessness, and the pallor of her skin gave a sensuous quality to her oval face, heightening the aura of feminity about her slender, almost fragile figure. The thought flickered across de Groot's mind that, if it came to the worst, she would stand a good chance with any jury of men.

"Look, Mrs. Harrison," he said. "I don't know whether you deserve any sympathy, so I'm not going to offer any. It will be easier for both of us if we get right down to essentials. The first thing I want to know is this. Why, out of 10,000 attorneys, did you call me?"

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She met his probing eyes steadily. "It seemed natural to turn to Johnny's firm. He always spoke of you with so much respect—" She finished the sentence with a little gesture of her thin, nervous hands.

De Groot puckered his lips in a silent, thoughtful whistle, before saying, "Come now, Mrs. Harrison. Here you are, accused of your husband's murder. You say you are innocent. Perhaps you are. But if today's papers are even half right, the evidence against you is — damning. Did it occur to you that if you could get a member of your husband's firm, one of his employers, to defend you, there would be an implication that you had convinced us of your innocence, and that might carry some weight with the jury that tries you?"

She shook her head, frowning a little. "I did not think of that."

"No? Well, whether you acted on impulse or calculation, it comes to the same thing. Our firm can't touch this case unless we are absolutely certain we are defending an innocent woman. My advice to you is to get yourself another lawyer — one who has no connection with either John or yourself."

She sat very still. "Then you won't defend me?"

"I didn't say that." He scowled at her, but it was a scowl of concentration, rather than of antagonism. "Look, I came here out of a sense of obligation to John. You could almost call it a guilt feeling. Yesterday, at the office, I had to talk to him pretty harshly. Things had gone wrong with several cases he had been handling — but the point is that he must have been badly depressed last night. That's why I was inclined to think at first that he might have committed suicide. When you telephoned and said he was dead, and they were arresting you, it seemed to me I had no choice but to act for you. Also, of course, I had met you and liked you. But now the picture is different. In the light of what I have heard about the case, I can't agree, at this moment, to be your counsel or even your friend. If you want to tell me your story, I'll listen. But get this. If, when you have given me the facts, I still think you may be guilty, I'll respect your confidence, but I shall refuse to handle the case. In all frankness, I think you would be better off with another attorney."

She heard him out attentively. Then she said, "I should like to tell you what happened."

He shrugged. "All right. Before you begin, though, I'll tell you something. It may make it easier for you. Early this morning I had a phone call from Coleman, the District Attorney up here. He asked me to come in to see him, before I saw you. It was an unconventional request, but under the circumstances it seemed best to agree. That's why I was late getting here."

Her intentness, as she listened, had an emotional charge that made him look at her keenly before proceeding.

"Coleman began by saying he had

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given most of the facts to the papers — that he was sure enough of his case so that he didn't have to try to spring any surprises at the trial. There were one or two facts that hadn't come out, though. And he thought it might save trouble all around if I understood his position.

"He said bluntly that he wanted to prevent me from letting you try to claim justifiable homicide. He said he himself had asked you last night, after your arrest, whether John had struck you, or had ever used violence toward you, and you said no to both questions. Is that right?"

She nodded, wordlessly. De Groot continued: "To make sure you wouldn't change your mind, Coleman said he had the jail matron examine you on arrival and that there were no marks or bruises on your body to suggest the need for self-defense. So you haven't a chance of proving justification. Especially since you had the gun."

"I had no idea of claiming —" she began, but he broke in, silencing her. "Let me finish — then you can talk. Coleman discussed another possibility. He said you might try to convince me that the shooting was unintentional, but that he would not even consider letting you off lightly on a manslaughter charge. He has evidence that rules out accident as a defense. The gun was fired twice."

"Twice!" She looked amazed.

De Groot's heavy eyebrows lifted skeptically. "You didn't know? Well, it's a fact. The bullet that killed John was found lodged in his cranium. The other shot had struck a full-length mirror across the room."

Beth said, "I don't understand."

"The inference would be clear to any jury," de Groot said sharply. "It rules out accident. The shot that struck the mirror might have been accidental, but to claim *two* unintentional shots goes beyond belief. Especially since the second shot was fired so close up that there were powder burns on John's forehead."

She winced, and he added quickly, "Don't weaken now. I've got to be direct if we're going to get anywhere. Just listen. Coleman thinks, in view of the evidence, that you knew what you were doing when you murdered John. His idea is that after the shooting, you were overcome with horror, went to the phone, called the police, and made your confession. Right then, he says, you became frightened, your instinct of self-preservation began to operate, and you began to try to lie your way out of it. But he admits that there is one other possibility. Temporary insanity."

She stared at him. Then she began to laugh uncontrollably. Rising, de Groot leaned forward and brought his open hand down with a loud slap on the table in front of her. The concussion startled her into a measure of self-command. "Sorry," she gasped. "But temporary insanity! You, too."

The scowl returned to his face. "Wait a second. Someone else made that suggestion? The man who was visiting you when I got here?"

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"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Peter Mount," she said.

He gave the name a moment's reflection. "The actor?"

"Yes."

He nodded. "It all hangs together. Somebody with influence has been pushing Coleman to settle this case with the shortest trial and least publicity possible. Evidently, this is the solution he wants. Well, Mrs. Harrison, you might do worse."

"Worse!" Her voice caught on the word. "What could be worse?"

"If you won't settle for this, Coleman will push the case to the hilt. He will try for the maximum penalty. Life, if not the chair."

She said violently, "I'll never plead guilty to a crime I didn't commit. I didn't kill John. I didn't! He killed himself."

"How can you hope to make that stick? If he killed himself, how do you account for the two shots? And your fingerprints on the gun? And the powder traces on the back of your hand? And your confession?"

She passed her hand wearily over her eyes.

As soon as he realized that she was not going to reply, he said, "All right. Let's get to the root of it. This alleged confession of yours." From his brief-case he extracted a folded copy of that day's New York *Times*, and found a marked paragraph on an inside page.

"This is the State Police version. Let me read it to you."

"Sergeant Joseph Cameron revealed that the phone call reporting Mr. Harrison's death came in at four minutes past 11 last night. The woman's voice was shrill, almost a scream, but the words were distinct: "I have just shot my husband. I murdered him." She then gave way to hysterical sobs, and finally broke the connection. The call was traced and was found to have come from the Harrison home in Ryeneck. State Troopers, headed by Sergeant Cameron, went at once to the scene of the crime. It is stated by a reliable source, however, that Mrs. Harrison, at the time of her arrest, repudiated this confession, saying that she had left the house to take a walk before the shooting, and that Mr. Harrison had committed suicide during her absence."

De Groot looked at Beth grimly. "Well?" he said. "What about that?"

"They told me," Beth said, "that I had confessed. But I didn't, Mr. de Groot. I didn't. I never even telephoned them."

A silent, skeptical moment passed. "Are you suggesting," he said, "that the State Police invented that story?"

"No." She drew out the syllable as if reluctant to let it go.

"Then you think someone else phoned them and tried to pin the murder on you?"

Her deep-sunk eyes widened, with a suggestion of panic. "I don't see," she said, uttering each word as if it were a heavy weight on her tongue, "who else could have known John was dead. I heard the shot as I came back to the house and opened the door."

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"Could anyone else have been in the house?"

"I ran right upstairs. And John was dead. There was nobody else."

"How unconvincing can you get? The more you talk, the more it sounds as if you were really out of your head at the time. The only way I can figure it, if you're not lying, is that you just don't know what happened."

Beth shook her head fretfully. "I couldn't have told the police I murdered John. I didn't do it. When I came into the bedroom he was dead, in his chair. The gun was still in his hand. Then I must have fainted."

"You're making it tough for yourself. Listen. Here are the facts." De Groot picked up the thick newspaper again.

"*The State Police found Harrison's body lying on the bedroom floor. He had been shot in the center of the forehead, the bullet passing through his brain and lodging in the outer wall of the cranium, killing him instantly. The murder gun was a small-bore Japanese automatic, a war souvenir for which Mr. Harrison had a license, and which, according to Mrs. Harrison, was normally kept in a bureau drawer. When the police arrived, the gun lay on a table near the body. Detectives from the office of Walter J. Coleman, District Attorney of Eastchester County, discovered Mrs. Harrison's fingerprints clearly marked on the smooth grip and trigger. Mr. Harrison's prints were on the barrel, suggesting a possible struggle for the gun. The diphenylamine test subsequently revealed traces of burnt gunpowder on the back of Mrs. Harrison's right hand. Her arrest for the murder of her husband followed.*"

Beth flushed under the challenge of de Groot's gaze. "I'm not crazy and Im not lying," she said. "I have been trying to think what could have happened. When I fainted, I must have stumbled against John's chair. His body must have fallen to the floor, where the police saw it. Because when I came to—" She stopped with the quick, indrawn breath of ugly memory.

"Take it easy," de Groot said. Reaching into his pocket, he brought out a pack of cigarettes, which he held up, to catch the attention of the guard at the door. The guard replied with a permissive gesture. Gratefully, Beth drew on the cigarette that de Groot lighted for her, before going on.

"When I came to, he was lying on the floor next to me. I tried to sit up and I felt his arm slide away. It was limp and horrible, and then I saw the blood on the carpet, and the wound, and I think I screamed."

"Where was the gun?"

"I must have picked it up. I remember seeing it in my hand, and putting it on the table. But it was all vague and unreal, like a nightmare. I can't remember any more than that. The State Troopers came in then."

"Could the gun have gone off accidentally when you picked it up?"

"I don't — no. I would remember if it had. I'm sure it didn't."

De Groot whistled again. This time

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the tune was barely audible — the opening bars of *Comin' Thro' the Rye.* After a while he said, "Let's try another angle. This walk you say you took. You were alone?"

"Yes."

"Are you accustomed to taking walks alone late at night?"

She shook her head. "No. I just felt like taking a walk."

He compressed his lips. "Did you see anyone? Did anyone see you?"

"No. It was a dark night and I stayed off the main road. There was no one around."

"So no one can corroborate your story?"

"I — I don't suppose so."

Wrinkles contracted de Groot's broad forehead, and for the first time a quirky smile showed at the corners of his mouth and eyes. "Mrs. Harrison," he said, "there is only one thing in your favor that I can see. You seem to be intelligent. And it is hard to believe that an intelligent woman would concoct so flimsy a story."

She smiled faintly in return. "Thank you for even that much belief."

"Mind you," he went on, "that wouldn't impress a jury. As matters stand, the evidence — confession, fingerprints, all the rest — is enough to convict you. You realize that?"

"Yes."

"The state's case is beautifully simple. Since there was no attempt to conceal the crime, they won't contend that it was premeditated. They will say that you acted on an impulse of rage — took the gun from its drawer — fired a shot — missed. Your husband tried to take the gun from you, and got his fingers on the barrel. You fired again — struck your mark. Then you were horrified at what you had done. You went to the telephone, called the police, blurted out your confession. That's their story."

She listened in silence. "Now," he said, "your story runs like this. You go out for this unusual walk. You'll have to explain why, but that can wait. You come back to the house. You hear the shot. You run upstairs. You see John dead in the chair. And you faint."

He ran a muscular hand contemplatively through his stubborn, sandy hair. "I'll assume for the moment that you're telling the truth. Where does that leave us? We've got to account, first, for those deadly words — *I murdered him.* How could you have said that unless you did? Wait a second."

He stared abstractedly at the single barred window above Beth's head. "Here's a possibility. The sight of John's dead body in the chair sends you into a state of shock, of temporary amnesia. When you go to the phone to call the police you are in a daze. Your actions are mechanical. What is in your mind? What would any good wife feel on finding her husband a suicide? Grief, yes. But guilt, too. Guilt because she realizes that she must have failed him. And it is guilt in that sense that makes you use those bald words of confession."

A fly buzzed over their heads in the murky daylight of the dusty room,

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and de Groot cocked one eyebrow at it, as if trying to convince it of his theory. "Let's see how the rest of it goes. Having summoned the police, you black out. Your falling weight pushes John's body out of his chair. You both lie on the floor now, he dead, you unconscious. Finally, you begin to come out of it. You sit up, see John's body. You scream. The gun is on the floor. You pick it up. It goes off, the bullet striking the mirror. That accounts for the second shot. You put the gun on the table — and then the State Police arrive. But the memory of your confession is gone. Your conscious mind now resists even a measure of moral guilt in John's death, and you cannot recall what you did after your first discovery of the body."

She breathed faster as she stared at him. "Do you really think it could have happened that way?" she said uncertainly.

He gave a short, mirthless laugh. "I would hate to try to convince a jury of it. For one thing, men rarely commit suicide by shooting themselves in the center of the forehead. No, if that's your best defense, you'll be looking through bars for the rest of your life."

Her voice was so low when she spoke that he had to lean forward to catch the words. "Then I'm lost."

"There's one hope," he said. "If you're telling the truth, there's one hope. Motive."

"I don't understand."

"Juries are impressed by character," he said. "That's as it should be. Murder is an expression of individual character. Convince a jury that murder is out of character for you, and you have a chance. To have murdered John, as the evidence indicates you did, you must have had to hate him passionately. You need to prove to the jury that you didn't hate him — that you had no motive for killing him. And that he did have a motive for suicide."

"Oh, he did. You know —"

He silenced her with a movement of his hand. "The essential question is how you felt about John. Now the D.A. will try to show that you had hidden reasons for wanting to be free of him. There's a hint of his thinking in this *Times* story."

He found the passage, and read:

"*The killing, as shown by the medical evidence, took place around 11 o'clock. Earlier in the evening, Mrs. Harrison was reported by State Police as having been involved in an automobile accident with another man, whose name was not divulged by the authorities. The man had subsequently driven her to her house, but had left in his car about half an hour before the shooting.*"

De Groot put down the newspaper and waited until Beth met his gaze. "Who was the man?"

"It was Peter Mount," she said, reluctantly. "But he had nothing to do with — what happened."

De Groot's manner changed abruptly. "Stop kidding yourself," he said harshly. "Mount is in this now, and he'll have to stay in. Unless, of

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course, you are ready to confess to the murder, and plead temporary insanity."

"No," she said. "No, I won't do that."

"All right, then. The prosecution has no choice. Regardless of how much influence Mount has, they are going to have to dig out the story of your relations with him. And if they have the slightest basis, they will build it into the usual triangle, with a sex angle, in order to show your motive for the murder."

"But it wasn't that way!" Beth cried.

"Look, Mrs. Harrison. If you spare him at the expense of your life, you're a fool, and you'll deserve what you get. If I, or any other lawyer, is to help you, you will have to tell everything that may have even a remote connection with the case, whether you like it or not. Give me facts, Mrs. Harrison."

She began to speak, stopped, took a deep, sighing breath, and said, "What do you want to know?"

"That's better. Were you in love with Mount? Having an affair with him?"

As she silently shook her head, he extinguished his cigarette with a restrained violence that revealed his irritation. "I'll try again. How long have you known him?"

"Since we were kids," she answered. "We were in love, at one time. But we had a quarrel and he went away. That was years ago. We didn't meet again until —" the gray eyes opened wide with astonishment — "until yesterday. It seems like eternity."

"Why did he come back? To see you?"

"No. We met at a cocktail party. I didn't even know he was going to be there. It was a surprise for both of us."

"What did you talk about?"

"I hardly know. Nothing important. Just froth. Peter was gay and amusing." She began to talk more rapidly, as if somewhere below the level of consciousness a gate had opened in her memory. "Finally I said I had to go. He urged me to stay — to have dinner out somewhere with the rest of the crowd. I told him the dinner I was interested in was back home on the stove, and that Johnny would be expecting it."

De Groot spurred her with, "Well?"

"Peter became insistent. With a few drinks in him, he was always hard to handle. That was why we fought, back when —" She checked herself. "At any rate, I said no, and left the party. He followed me out to my car, still trying to persuade me to stay."

"And that was all?" de Groot said skeptically.

"No. He did a crazy thing. When I drove off, he jumped into his own car and followed me. He caught up with me about a mile away and tried to make me stop. The result was I ran off the road, hit a tree, and smashed up my car."

De Groot made an irritable noise in his throat, half growl, half snort. "Romantic derring-do!" he said. "Some people never grow up."

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"That's what I said to Peter. I was so mad and shaken that I trembled. Of course, he was contrite. Living out here, we use a car all the time, and Peter said we could have his until ours was out of the repair shop. But I didn't intend to let him off so easily. I told him just what I thought of him. After a while I calmed down, and we found a telephone and sent for a tow-car. I tried to phone Johnny, but there was no answer at the house. Then we went back to Peter's car to wait for the garage man. That's when the accident was reported. A State Trooper on a motorcycle stopped to look at the wreck, and spoke to us."

"How long before the tow-car came?"

"About twenty minutes, I would say. When the garage man drove away with my car, Peter wanted to go somewhere for a drink. I told him if he dared to stop I would get out and walk, and finally he drove me home."

"Did he go in?"

"At first, I told him he couldn't. But he said he wanted to apologize to Johnny, and I realized it might be a good idea to have them settle the insurance arrangements for the car. So we went inside. It was nearly 8 o'clock, but Johnny wasn't there. Peter said he would wait, and asked if he could have a drink. I needed one — I was still feeling a little shaken — so I let him make highballs for us."

"Do you have a maid?"

She stopped short, puzzled by the question. "Why, no. Just a cleaning woman who comes in the morning."

"Worse and worse," said de Groot. "The prosecution will lap this up. Your husband is not at home. You bring your former sweetheart into the house and drink with him alone." He sighed. "Let's have the rest of it."

Her long, sinewy fingers twisted nervously. "Right after that the telephone rang. It was Johnny, calling from the office." She hesitated. "We had a difficult conversation."

"Difficult? Why?"

"A misunderstanding."

"Mrs. Harrison." De Groot's voice deepened and his muscular hands suddenly made big fists on the table. "Where's your sense of proportion? I'm groping around for facts that might conceivably help you. I don't know where we will find them, if at all. This is no time to try to preserve appearances. If you freeze up on me now, I can't do a thing for you. I need details. Stop resisting me. What did John say?"

"I'm sorry." She raised her eyes to meet de Groot's gaze. "He was annoyed because he had called once before and I hadn't answered. I reminded him that I had gone to the cocktail party. Then he said he was going to be so late getting home that I shouldn't wait dinner for him — he would get something near the office."

De Groot nodded. "I had kept him late."

"He sounded upset. I can — could — always tell from Johnny's voice when he was angry or excited — it became so high-pitched. I asked him

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what was wrong, and he said he had had a bad session with one of the partners, and he felt like telling the firm to go to hell. I begged him not to do anything rash. He said nobody had shown any understanding. He had had some bad breaks, but everyone took the position that it was his fault."

"It was." De Groot's voice became hard again. "He had let himself be outsmarted — but that's irrelevant. Go on. What else did he say?"

The memory made her catch her lip in her lower teeth. "He asked me, all at once, whether I was drunk. He said my voice sounded like it. I hadn't drunk much, but the smash-up must have affected me. I really did feel a little fuzzy. Johnny said —" She stopped abruptly.

"Don't try to conceal anything. Well?"

"He said, 'That's my loving wife. While I get my professional throat cut, you get yourself tight.'"

"What did you say?"

"I said it wasn't true, I wasn't tight, and we had a silly squabble."

"Could Mount hear all this?"

"Yes. The telephone is in a little hall, just off the living room. He couldn't help but hear. I realized I had to tell Johnny that Peter was there — and about the car. I hated to do it just then, but it seemed best to prepare him before he got home. So I took a deep breath and told him."

"How did he take it?"

She closed her eyes tightly before answering. "First he wanted to make sure that Peter realized he was responsible for the damage, and he started to talk about the insurance. Then suddenly he remembered Peter's name. He knew about Peter and me — I mean, years ago, when —"

"Yes. What was it that made you wince just now? Give me his words. Do you remember them?"

"I'll never forget them. He said, 'Your old boy friend. How nice for you.' I said, 'Don't be unfair, Johnny.' And he just mimicked me. 'Don't be unfair! Don't be unfair!' It was childish and ugly. Then he said, 'You've got plenty of time to have your fun. I can't be home for a couple of hours.'"

She began to cry. De Groot waited, whistling silently, until she had mastered herself. Finally he said, conversationally, "What did you say to that?"

"I — I lost my temper. I said he was making a fool of himself — that just because he was having trouble at the office, he was taking it out on me. Then — oh, I wish I hadn't — I called him a weakling. He didn't say anything more. He just hung up."

De Groot's big-featured face twisted sardonically. "That's all you needed. A bitter quarrel, in front of a witness. I've got to hand it to you. Even to be able to protest your innocence under these conditions shows courage. What was that line of Henley's? 'In the fell clutch of circumstance.' If you're telling the truth, circumstance has the fellest clutch on you I've ever heard about! What did you do next?"

"Nothing. I just stood at the tele-

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phone. I was in a temper. Not at Johnny alone. At everything. Peter. Myself. Life. Fate. Then Peter said he supposed he ought to go. But I wasn't going to give Johnny any encouragement for his stupid suspicions. I knew if Peter was gone when Johnny got home he would think the worst. I wanted to face it all out with him. So I told Peter he must not dare to go until he had talked with Johnny."

"Too innocent," said de Groot.

"I don't understand."

"I'm sorry to sound skeptical. As a lawyer and bachelor, I've learned to look twice when wives find excuses to be alone with other men. Most of the men on the jury will feel the same way. They will want to know whether Mount really stayed to clear things up with John — or because he knew you wanted him to make love to you."

"I didn't! I meant just what I said!"

"Are you telling me that he didn't even make a pass at you?"

She hesitated. "He tried — when we were in the kitchen. But I stopped him. I told him he had made enough trouble, and that I would stand no nonsense from him. He saw I meant it, and was very good after that. He had sobered up considerably, by then."

"All right. I'll take your word for it. Go on from there. You spoke of the kitchen. That sounds like food."

"There was dinner on the stove — I had prepared a chicken casserole. Both of us needed something to eat, so I heated it up."

"The more you tell me, the darker the picture gets. Suppose Mount backs you up by saying he didn't make love to you. Who would believe him? Look at the facts from the jury's standpoint. You are alone with him in your house. Your husband is late at the office — worried about his job. And you and the other man sit down to the dinner you had prepared for your husband. What sort of character does that suggest?"

"What else could I have done?" she demanded.

"That's not the point. To the jury, it will be clear that a motive for murder — for getting rid of the inconvenient husband — was shaping up. You were bitter at him — and presumably in love with another man. What more natural than that you should ask the husband to let you go — and when he refused, killed him in a rage?"

"But I wasn't in love with Peter. I had no such motive."

"Can you prove that? Try it this way. What did you and Mount talk about?"

"At dinner he asked me about Johnny — what sort of person he was. By that time I had cooled off, and I tried to make him realize that Johnny was a better man than he had sounded, and that I had been unjust in the way I talked to him. I showed him Johnny's photograph."

"How did Mount react?"

"He laughed. He said Johnny was too handsome to be deeply attractive to a woman of spirit, and that I must have married him on the rebound.

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That made me angry. I told Peter he was flattering himself, and we dropped the subject. Then we began to talk about Peter's plays and experiences on Broadway. We took our coffee into the living room, and he went on to tell me about the new play he is going to do this fall. I was so interested that I almost forgot all the unpleasantness earlier."

"This went on — how long?"

"Until Johnny got home."

"What time was that?"

"A little after 10. As soon as I saw his face, I knew there was going to be trouble."

"And there was?"

"Johnny walked right up to Peter." Her mouth started to work, but she managed to keep her voice almost level. "He said — it was a kind of snarl — he said, 'Mount, you can have my wife, but you can't wreck my car and get away with it. All I want from you is your license number and the name of your insurance company.' " She gave a little gasp. "Mr. de Groot, he didn't mean it. He was overwrought. He must have been planning to say that, to hurt me, but he never meant it."

"I'm interested in what he said. Was that all?"

"No. He said to Peter, 'After we get this car thing settled, you can clear out. You can take her with you, if you want her.' That was when Peter hit him."

"Hit him! That's the first I've heard of it. What happened?"

"He just swung his fist and knocked Johnny down. Johnny staggered back and collapsed on the floor, with a dazed look. I stood there, like a stupid thing. Peter began to talk to me. I don't know what he said. I got enough command of myself to tell him to go. He didn't want to leave me alone with Johnny, but I said I could take care of myself. Then he went out and drove away."

"You're sure he drove away? You *saw* him?"

"The door was shut, but I heard his car."

"Then you're not sure. Go on."

"Johnny got up. He held on to the couch, and looked at me, and began to curse me. He didn't raise his voice, but that was all the worse. He said terrible things. I began to cry. I guess I was close to hysteria. All at once I knew I had to get out of the house or I would break down. I remember opening the door and slamming it after me. I guess the slam was a kind of answer to Johnny. Then I began to walk. I started to think about what I would do. I knew I had to leave Johnny. At least for a while, until we could see whether there was anything left of our marriage. But I felt, too, that it was cruel to leave him just when everything was going wrong in his life. The more I thought about it, the more confused and uncertain I became. Finally I got tired and started back to the house. I didn't know what I would say to Johnny, but I knew we had to have it out and see where we stood. Just as I opened the front door, I heard the shot."

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"Only one shot?"

"Yes. Only one."

"Did you know it was a gunshot? Not a car backfiring, for instance?"

"I knew. There was no doubt what it was. It came from the bedroom. Johnny always kept the gun there. I ran upstairs and saw him."

"In the chair?"

"Yes."

"How was he sitting?"

"His head had fallen to one side. His arm was dangling to the floor."

"And then?"

"I've told you."

"Tell me again."

"I fainted. I don't know how long it was before I came to. When I opened my eyes and tried to sit up, I saw Johnny's body on the floor next to me, and all the blood under his head." Her voice had become dull, as if weary from repetition of the words. "I think I screamed. I heard a car down below, and I made an effort to stand up. I was very dizzy, but I managed to get to my feet. The pistol was in my hand, and I put it on the table, and got to a chair just as the State Troopers came in. One of them said I had telephoned them. I didn't know what he meant. It didn't seem important, then."

For some moments, de Groot whistled softly to himself. Then, looking at Beth with more excitement than she had yet seen in his face, he said, "Either you're lying or your story is all wrong."

"I've told you the truth," she said.

"Have you? You said John was dead when you came into that room. He couldn't have been."

"But I saw him! I heard the shot and saw him."

"Did you see the wound in his head?"

"No. I blacked out then. I told you."

"Yes. You expected to see John dead, so that is what you saw. But you didn't see a wound, because there was none."

Her eyes were enormous with incredulity. "How can you know that?"

"You told me yourself. You said before that when you first entered the bedroom, the pistol was still in his hand."

She nodded.

"That's where your story breaks down. That shot through the brain killed John instantly. A dead man's fingers would not have held on to a heavy automatic as it dropped from the level of his head. Especially if he had shot himself in that ridiculous way, through the center of the forehead. The gun was bound to fall out of his hand. There is no other possibility."

"What are you saying to me?" Her voice was a whisper.

"That John was alive — not even wounded — when you went into the bedroom. Another thing. The blood you saw under his head when his body lay on the carpet. If he had died in the chair, the blood would have trickled from the wound onto his face and clothes, or on the chair. There wouldn't have been enough on

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the carpet to strike your attention."

"But the shot," she insisted. "The shot I heard."

"That could only have been the shot that struck the mirror."

She pressed her hands together in an agony of confusion.

"It doesn't make sense. Johnny must have been dead! Why would he have shot at the mirrot? Why would he have *pretended* to be dead?"

De Groot's manner became urgent. "That's the key to the whole thing. Why would he have pretended? Look for the answer in your heart."

"What do you mean?"

"What was John's state of mind? He had lost his self-respect, he was losing his cases and his job, and he had lost, or thought he was losing, his wife. Suicidal? Of course."

"If only I could have —"

"Stop that. Stick to the point. You knew John. He wasn't precisely a strong character. We knew that in the firm. A stronger man in that frame of mind might have taken the gun from its drawer and shot himself with no more ado. John wasn't made that way. He was an egoist. He was — must have been — full of self-pity."

She made a small, protesting gesture. "Look," he said impatiently, "We can't waste time on conventional attitudes toward the dead. John wanted a way out. He would have liked to get the benefits of suicide without actually killing himself — and who wouldn't, sometimes? Imaginatively, he would have taken pleasure in the thought of your shock and misery at discovering his body. I can see him sitting there, looking at the pistol with fear, hating himself, wishing that he had guts enough to pull the trigger. Then he heard you at the front door. He had to do something — use the gun or put it back. He couldn't bring himself to do either. Instead, he made the compromise of a weak man. He wanted to dramatize his own misery — and he wanted revenge on you. What more natural than the impulse to fire the gun, simulate suicide, and give you the fright of your life? To make you realize his desperation."

"I don't understand," she said wonderingly.

"You're not trying. Think! There he sits — and across the room is a mirror. Perhaps he could see his reflection in it. That would have been in character — a symbolic suicide, shooting at his own image. He lifts the gun, fires at the glass, and then slumps in the chair. A mockery of death, to shock you, hurt you, perhaps trap you into saying or doing something he could use against you."

There was a long pause. "But then," Beth said, "someone killed him." Her breath came more quickly. "You're saying that I killed him."

He concentrated a look of almost hypnotic intensity on her, as if he were trying to probe the innermost layers of her consciousness. "Your fingerprints were on the gun. The burnt gunpowder was on your hand. Only one more shot was fired from that gun. Obviously, *yours was the hand that fired it!*"

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A trace of color came into her face as she listened. "I see," she said quickly. "Then you think I'm guilty after all."

He shook his head. "No. When you first told me your story, I was inclined to believe it because it was too stupid to be false. Now I believe it for the opposite reason. To have killed John, to tell that story, and to twist this explanation out of me, you would have to be seven degrees smarter than Lucifer. I don't think you're that smart."

Her eyes showed the confusion and turmoil in her mind.

"Give me time," de Groot said. "I'm piecing it together. The mistake I made was that I was so anxious to find out whether you hated John, I didn't stop to consider that he might have hated you."

"Oh," she said quickly. "He didn't really — it was just that —"

"Don't delude yourself. Perhaps he loved you once. But can't you see how he must have felt before he died? You were the center of all his fears and frustrations and miseries. You made him aware of his weaknesses. You loved another man and despised him."

"But I didn't. I was only sorry —"

"I'm telling you what he must have thought. He wanted you to suffer as he was suffering. He pulled the trigger and waited for your reaction. You fainted — and he saw you lying crumpled on the floor. What were his thoughts?"

"How can we know?" she said.

"Because human beings are — human. The impulse to suicide was still in him — and he hated you. The wish that you and he were both dead must have been in his mind. He didn't have the courage to die alone — but if he could take you with him! But he wouldn't dare to kill you first. Knowing himself, he would realize that if he did that, he might not be able to go through with his suicide, and would have to pay the penalty for murder. And then the idea must have come to him. *To have you pay that penalty.*"

"Oh!" Beth cried. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"That instead of you having murdered your husband, it was he who tried to murder you. And almost succeeded."

"But how? How?"

"I can see it clearly, now. His need to make you suffer gave him courage that he didn't have without you. . . . He went to the telephone. Called the police. With that high-pitched voice of his, it was easy for him to mimic you. That's where we got off the track. People always assume that a confession has to follow a crime. But there is nothing to prevent confessing to a crime that is not yet committed."

"I can't believe it!"

"Why else would anyone have sobbed into the telephone, keeping the connection open long enough to enable the police to trace the call? When he rang off, he knew they would soon be there."

Beth whispered. "He must have been crazy."

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"No crazier than most men when their lives fall to pieces. He was seething. His mind excluded everything but this one terrible need to express his loathing of himself — and of you. He had gone too far to back down. Then came the really sinister touch. The fingerprints and the powder traces. Don't you see what he must have done?"

"I think I do," she said, still in that strained whisper.

"Lying down on the floor beside you. Wiping off his fingerprints on the grip. Putting the gun in your inert hand. Your finger on the trigger. Placing the muzzle to his head. Then a final surge of desperation — and he presses *your* trigger finger. Committing suicide *with your hand.* That's when he died. That was the second shot, which you never heard."

Beth closed her eyes for a long moment. "What must I do?" she said.

"Do nothing. It's up to me. In view of what I know now, I am positive I can establish reasonable doubt. The District Attorney has sense enough to see that. Besides, he wants an easy way out of this case. He'll be glad to settle if he gets the credit for solving an unusual suicide, and preventing a dead man from committing a murder by legal process."

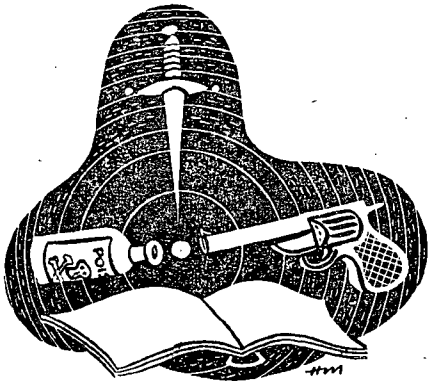
She looked up at him. "I don't have any words."

"You don't need any. You can show your gratitude, if you like, by coming to dinner with me some time — when you feel up to it."

"You're a strange man," she said, with a sudden smile.

The little, thoughtful whistle came from his lips again. This time she heard the tune plainly, and knew the words. "*If a body meet a body, comin' thro' the rye . . .*"

Then he said, "Goodbye for now," and rising, motioned to the guard to open the door.



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A WINNER IN EQMM's PRIZE CONTEST

MRRRAR!

by EDGAR PANGBORN

TIMMY ATE HIS FIELD MOUSE, washed, and climbed on a log for a cat's midsummer-night thoughts; black, ten pounds of readiness, no longer young.

Above the house beyond the hayfield a night hawk was rasping. A swaying of trees now and then released the brilliance of village lights a mile away. Down the blind thread of a nearby road swept a noise, with blazing eyes; Timmy ignored it, but tensed at something else appearing on the road — human, it was moving with unhuman quiet, slinking to Timmy's house, crouching at the back door.

Timmy had left through that door two hours ago, by request. Returning, he need only jump on the box outside it and rattle the knob. There would be delays, creaks, moanings — but The Friend would come; it was rarely necessary to wail. The Friend would open up, and say: "Well, damn it . . ."

That human shadow entered the woodshed. Nothing of importance. Timmy relaxed, yawned, and stretched . . .

The Friend used little of the house except the kitchen. His musty cot was there, and a rocking chair where Timmy could sprawl in his lap accepting the caress of crinkled hands, responding with his own baritone purr. It was a good life: Timmy could take it on his own terms.

The shadow was at the door again. A hint of smell with evil association reached Timmy, but it was too faint for complete recognition, and the memory was many days old . . .

A good life. Compatibility; a supply of milk and mixed-up meat that wasn't bad, and sometimes a sardine; mutual concessions and forbearance. Periodically one of those road-monsters stopped, with one who clattered in to spread mysteries on the table and exchange with Timmy's associate a harmless barking; after this episode something of value usually appeared in Timmy's dish. Few others ever came; when they did Timmy retired under The Friend's cot — except for The Friend he distrusted the tribe.

For one, a slab-faced roarer, he had loathing. Not long ago, The Friend had been engaged in one of his peculiar activities — prying up a floor board, lifting a black box, waving away Timmy's nose while the box rustled and jingled. The roarer had arrived during the operation, with uncharacteristic quiet. The Friend had jumped up; the atmosphere was stiff with alarm; Timmy had gone

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under the cot. But then the intruder had made peaceful sounds, while Timmy studied barnyard-smelling feet and a furry something dangling at the roarer's middle — a rabbit's foot, its odor not quite gone. In time, Timmy had emerged. And without warning the roarer had grabbed his tail, a wet mouth letting off a blast of noise. Timmy had gashed a thick arm and fled in swollen rage while the kitchen boiled, shrillness mingling with the roaring and a slam of the back door. Timmy had not seen the roarer again; once or twice he had caught a whiff of the same stench outdoors, and had hidden in the grass.

The shadow was of no importance. It was only making noiseless motions at the window, lifting it, climbing inside. Timmy stretched again, and wandered into the woods, the best part of the world, his feet touching leaf-mold as an owl's wing touches air.

In a moonless clearing he played make-believe with a pine cone, falling on his side to kick at it, having fun . . .

His ears warned him in time to whirl on his back — hell was loose, on an owl's down-padded wings. Timmy strove, with teeth and slashing legs — no such rabbit as the owl may have imagined. A hook stabbed; Timmy yelled, and raked a wild tufted face. The horror let go and vanished in the night.

One talon had bared a rib, going no deeper, but the gash was painful. Recovering from shock in the safety of thick brush, Timmy licked it. In due time he crept slowly home, watchful of the sky. A new thing — trouble had never before come at Timmy out of the sky. But in his careful passage he had no traffic with imaginary dangers. Timmy met danger as he should: readiness was all.

He jumped to his box. Near the house that faint Bad Smell now identified itself — slab-faced roarer and no mistake. But pain and the desire for known shelter were strongest: the door-knob had to be rattled. Here was a difficulty: normally the right paw was the knob-rattling paw, and the wound was on Timmy's right side. But he made it.

There had been dim sounds of motion in the house; instead of answering Timmy's application, they ceased. A dead moment; then a pounding of heavy steps — away. The front door banged open; feet thudded up the road. Though alarming, that was all of secondary importance.

What mattered was that The Friend had to come. Timmy rattled again; after a decent interval he wailed. The front door squealed in rising wind, but that was all . . . Timmy tried the woodshed: no good.

He considered a window-sill, but his side hurt too much when he bunched for a leap. At last his forlorn prowling brought him to the open front door; he trotted through to the kitchen, tail up, calling inquiry. He sniffed at torn-up floor boards, an empty black box, and hurried to his dish. It was overturned, but he licked

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some comfort from a milk puddle.

The bulk on the cot was the right size for The Friend. A dangling hand smelled almost right; Timmy saw it twitch, and arched his neck to rub against it. No answering caress, but something tumbled — a rabbit's foot on a bit of cord, fastened in some substance with marks on it that clicked as Timmy pushed it. But the atmosphere was wrong for play. Timmy batted the thing idly under the cot, and climbed up.

The bumps and hollows were wrong, unresponsive. Any position troubled the smarting side; Timmy whimpered in exasperation. The Friend was not quite there. Only a pillow at the head end — some spread of white hair above it, but the pillow had the Bad Smell. Timmy returned to his milk puddle: dried up. The front door continued its noise, squeaking and pounding . . .

A road-master hummed slowly past, stopped, and returned. Brisk footsteps, noise of a voice. Timmy went under the cot.

Below a round white glare in the kitchen doorway Timmy saw legs in a dark shining of leather. These hurried to the cot; the pillow hit the floor. A hand came into Timmy's line of vision, feeling The Friend's fingers, lifting them out of sight. The Leather Legs ran out shouting, returning with another like himself. A spitting flare bloomed into white steady light on the table — The Friend had done that every evening. The object hanging near the back door was jangled: Timmy was used to that — The Friend had often wound the crank as Leather Legs did now, and made his noises into it.

One Leather Legs peered under the cot — usual arrangements of pale skin, mouth, nose. He said: "Here, kitty, kitty!" Timmy spat.

The milk dish was righted and filled. A Leather Legs was busy at the table, but his companion stood too near the hall door — no chance to make a break for it yet. Timmy nosed the rabbit's foot, bored.

The table noises were tearing clashes and a moderate "Damn!" — as if The Friend himself were doing the miracle, a miracle now confirmed by the celestial odor and substance of sardine. Beyond the cot Timmy thrust an inquiring face like a black moon. Leather Legs retired. Watching the two with readiness, Timmy accepted . . . Then the milk. A Leather Legs reached; Timmy went under the cot. But pain was easing; thirst was appeased; he could wait it out. If The Friend had come back, Timmy might even have made overtures, to the extent of sniffing a shoe-tip. But The Friend did not come back.

Fine night odors were pouring in; The Bad Smell was almost cleaned away. A fox barked, answered by the passion of a dog-voice in the village; the night hawk grated. Timmy worried the rabbit's foot to pass the time.

Poor stuff — no wiggle. A casual flirt of his paw sent it out into lamplight. A hand swooped down for it with a lively "Hey!"

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Timmy didn't mind. What interested him was that now the doorway was clear. A Leather Legs was again booming into the jangling thing.

Timmy ran.

A shout followed him. Actually a human expression of gratitude and esteem, offering an option on a second sardine.

But to Timmy it was only a type of barking. The Friend had gone away.

He watched the sky, traveling slowly but with lessening pain. Trouble, of course, can come from any quarter of the universe: readiness is all. The forest was the best part of the world — there you sometimes even met your own kind. Timmy said: "Mrrrar. Mrrrar-aorrh?"

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Black Mask *is now part of* EQMM

So far we have brought you only reprints from Black Mask — stories by Dashiell Hammett and Cornell Woolrich two months ago, and by Raoul Whitfield and John D. MacDonald last month. Now we can offer you the first original story in our Black Mask section — an original that has all the toughness and terseness you have come to expect from the hardboiled type of 'tec.

"'Bye, 'Bye, Darling" won a special award in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. It was written by a real-life detective, a man with more than a dozen years of experience on the Homicide Division of a large Western city's police department — for obvious reasons we cannot be more specific. The author, John L. Hayward, is now in his late thirties and at the time of this writing has the rank of Sergeant. All of which explains the note of authenticity that you will find in his story. True to the rough-tough tradition, Mr. Hayward's story also has that occasional touch of the romantic, that hard lacquer of style, that subdued sense of excitement, that flair for graphic detail, that pent-up understatement, that feeling for the raw and the physical — all trademarks of the realistic school that so often these days reads like satire rather than seriousness. But in the end we think you will agree that Mr. Hayward knows what he's writing about . . .

'BYE, 'BYE, DARLING

by JOHN L. HAYWARD

FOUR DOORS FROM HER HOME, HE parked his coupe under the draggling fronds of a giant palm. He removed the ignition key, opened the glove compartment, and took out a pint of bourbon. Leaning sideways in the seat, he thrust the bottle into his right hip pocket, drew his coat down over it, and climbed from the car.

The haunting sweetness of Spring filled the night air. Lack of a moon made shadows dark. Subdued sounds of family life filtered from opened windows: the whining melody of a love song, a woman's querulous complaint, the protesting voice of a child on the way to bed.

His crepe-soled shoes were noiseless on the sidewalk. He passed a yellow stucco house, a white stucco house,

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and a green stucco house with a wide belt of varnished redwood across its front. The fourth house was of drab gray stucco trimmed in white. He walked down the driveway to the back, let himself into the kitchen, closed and locked the door.

There was a sudden slither of sound and quick running footsteps in the next room. In an instant the slim figure of a woman was outlined in the connecting doorway.

"You did come," she said flatly, a deep bitterness in her tone.

"I said I would."

"You say a lot of things." She turned and went back into the living room.

"You're in a bad mood," he observed. He followed her into the room and sat down on the couch beside her.

"Why shouldn't I be?" she demanded. Her eyes were dark with moodiness and her face sullen, but she raised one hand and ran her fingers through his close-cropped hair. Even in the subdued light, thin lines of greediness and hate showed on her sharp features.

Involuntarily, he shivered.

Some of the moodiness slipped out of her eyes. She leaned forward and rubbed her cheek against his. "Do I do things to you, darling?" she asked, her voice a croon.

"You know you do, baby," he told her.

She laughed abruptly and her face hardened. "You think I'm pretty soft, don't you?" she demanded, drawing away.

"Don't be silly."

"I've been silly, but that's over. I'm going to do what I said."

"You always want to quarrel."

She glared at him. "I always want to quarrel!" she mimicked fiercely. "I haven't any patience! Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Smooth-and-Easy, I'm no good at keeping secrets, either!"

"How do you mean that?"

"Just what I said last time. Nobody's going to make a sucker out of me! If you haven't nerve enough to tell your wife — I'll tell her!"

"Relax, baby."

"I mean it!"

"I resigned this afternoon."

Her lips parted with astonishment. "You actually quit that lousy job? I don't believe it!"

"You never believe anything."

She stared at him. "We're going away together?" Her voice was uncertain.

"That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Triumph flooded her face. She slid over into his lap.

"It was the only way, darling," she assured him, her voice exultant. "You want me with you all the time, don't you?"

"You know that."

"Well, when do we leave?"

"Tonight, if you want."

Her eyes widened and searched his. Then she hugged him and laughed.

"When my darling makes up his mind, he really gets off the fence, doesn't he! All right, I'll go pack."

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"Let's have a drink first." He tipped her in his lap and pulled the bottle from his pocket.

"I don't have to get up any nerve," she jeered.

"I want you in a good mood."

The lines in her face grew softer. She kissed him on the tip of his nose.

"I've been mean to my darling, haven't I? I'm sorry. You know I can't drink, though."

"Tonight you can."

"One, then."

"I don't want you changing your mind when we get a few miles out of town."

"I won't change *my* mind!" She slid from his lap and went into the kitchen.

As soon as she disappeared through the doorway, he took a clean handkerchief from his coat pocket and carefully wiped the bottle. Then, holding it in a fold of the cloth, he set it on the end table.

"You forgot the bottle," he called.

"Bring it in!" Her voice was impatient.

He took a deep breath. "I'm too damned comfortable, baby."

A small silence developed in the kitchen. She appeared in the doorway, stared, then came over and kissed him on the lips, surrounding him with the musky odor of perfume and body scent.

"I'll have to watch my darling," she said, an odd note of half-pleasure in her voice. "He could get difficult."

She snatched the bottle from the table and in a few minutes was back, ice clinking gently in the two glasses she carried. Settling herself on the couch, one leg tucked under, she handed him his drink. Her face was sullen now.

"If you have to get drunk first, let's get on with it," she said sulkily. "These are good and strong."

"You're the one I want to get drunk."

"That's funny," she said bitterly.

"You never relax."

"I won't relax until we're on our way." She drank deeply and then rotated the glass between her palms. "You'd like to back out, wouldn't you?"

He stiffened. "You can be awfully silly sometimes, baby."

"Well, you've sure stalled along."

"I just wanted to be sure we were doing the right thing, that's all."

"I'd like to believe that!"

"I wish you would."

Her face relaxed a little. "It's been terrible for me — living with him, letting him touch me."

"I know it, baby."

"I don't want anybody to touch me except you." A slight thickness had come into her voice. She tipped her glass and finished the drink.

"That's the way I want it, too." He drained his glass. "Let's have another one."

"You'll have to pack."

"All right." He kissed the slack blonde curls behind her ear. She shivered, turned and kissed him, her mouth hard and unyielding against his.

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They got up then and walked into the kitchen, arms around each other. He leaned against the sink while she mixed the drinks.

"More than that," he told her, when she poured from the bottle.

"Not in mine. I can't take it — honestly."

"Tonight's different."

She tipped the bottle and giggled as the amber liquid streamed from its neck.

"Here's to Arizona," he toasted, raising his glass.

"Is that where we're going?"

"It's a good place."

"Any place is a good place — if it's away from here."

"You said it, baby."

"To Arizona — and us!" She drank greedily, eyes closed, throat moving rhythmically. "I'm drunk now," she announced, putting down the half-empty glass.

"Well, polish off the rest and we'll get to hell out of here."

She lifted the glass and drank again. Her face was flushed as she set down the empty glass. The pupils of her eyes were dilated and her breathing had quickened.

"Kiss me," she said urgently, "kiss me hard!"

He swallowed the last of his drink and took her in his arms. They kissed, her lips now slack against his, her body limp in his arms. Then her arms circled his neck convulsively and she twisted her lips free.

"Hold me tight, darling, hold me tight!"

"Like this?" He tautened his arms and she moaned like a child having bad dreams.

"You do love me, don't you?" she asked in a fierce whisper.

"You know I do."

"Always hold me tight like this."

"That won't be hard to do."

"Always be sweet to me."

"That won't be hard either."

She kissed him again, this time straining her body against his. Finally, he pushed her away.

"Let's get your stuff together."

"I'm drunk."

"I guess you are, at that." He put an arm around her and they walked through the dining room, down the hall to the bedroom. He switched on the light, then quickly stepped back into the hallway.

"Pull the shades down, baby," he told her.

"What for?"

"Go on, baby, pull them down."

"You're a coward," she said flatly, her voice thick, but she went on unsteady legs to draw the blinds.

"You better write him a note," he told her, when she was through.

"What for?" she asked again, her face sullen.

"So he'll know you won't be back. We don't want the whole police department looking for us."

She staggered over to the dresser at the foot of the bed. On top of it was the framed picture of a middle-aged man in a police uniform and cap. He had a long face, a long nose, and wistful eyes. The cap was a shade too

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large and was centered squarely on his head.

"What a sad-looking sack!" she jeered. Opening the top drawer of the dresser, she fumbled for a sheet of note paper and a pencil. Leaving the drawer open, she came back and sat down on the bed.

"What'll I say?" she asked wearily.

" 'Dear Pete,' " he dictated.

She laid the paper on the table beside the bed, wrote the words in a careful scrawl, and then looked at them owlishly. "I can't even write."

"You're doing fine."

"What should I say next?"

" 'I can't stand it any longer.' "

She stared at him blankly.

"I'm telling you what to put down," he explained.

"Oh — do you think I should say that?"

"It's the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes, but —"

"You don't want him trying to find us, do you?"

"No, I don't want that," she admitted and began to write.

"Next, I'd say, 'It's not your fault — I just can't go on like this any longer. Goodbye.' "

She wrote laboriously and then hesitated. "Should I just put 'goodbye' or would 'goodbye forever' be better?"

"Either one."

She frowned and finally added the 'forever.' "I think I should say something like, 'It won't do you any good to try to find me,' don't you?" She started to write.

He reached quickly and pulled away the paper. "That's like telling kids not to put beans in their ears," he told her.

She looked up at him in bewilderment.

"It's an old gag," he explained. "Telling him he couldn't find you would be a challenge. Then, he'd try."

"Oh, I see," she said, with no change in expression, and added, "I think I'm going to be sick."

"Lie down a minute."

He pushed her back, lifted her legs up on the bed, and sat beside her. She stared at the picture on the dresser.

"He looks so damn sad," she said thickly.

"You don't really want to leave, do you?"

"Don't be silly. I hate him." She closed her eyes and shielded them with her left forearm.

He opened the drawer of the table beside the bed, put his finger through the trigger guard of the .32 automatic that was in there, lifted it out, and closed the drawer. Then, holding it by the grooves on the slide, he placed it in her right hand, curving her fingers around the butt and holding them in place. His pulse quickened and his breath came short and fast.

"What are you doing?" She sat bolt upright, apprehension in her voice, face startled.

"Shoot him," he said.

"What are you doing?" she asked again, frightened now.

"Shoot him," he repeated. "Put a

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bullet right through his sad-looking face." He pulled on her arm, trying to straighten it, pointing the gun at the picture on the dresser.

"You're drunk," she said thickly, pulling back.

He still held his arm around hers, keeping the gun in place.

"It won't make much noise — and you'll feel better," he urged. His breath came in sighing rasps.

"I'm not going to!" she protested fretfully. "Put the gun away."

He stopped pulling. She sank back on the pillow, her arm relaxed, closing her eyes again. Deftly, he flexed her arm at the elbow, twisted her wrist so that the muzzle of the little automatic was against the bone back of her right ear — and pressed the trigger.

The gun made a small, coughing explosion. Her eyes flicked open and her body tensed. Her facial muscles writhed, her lips parted, and a strangled sound came from her throat. Then she twisted slightly to the left and was still.

He slid from the bed and released her arm. The arm flopped away from her body and hung over the edge of the bed. The gun slipped from her fingers and thudded to the carpet. A small red worm of blood began to ooze from the hole behind her ear.

He smoothed out the depression on the bed where he had been sitting and went down the hall to the kitchen, leaving the small table lamp burning beside the bed. Rinsing out his glass, he dried it and held it between the folds of the dish towel as he returned it to the cupboard. He left the bottle of bourbon on the sink, the cap off.

He turned out the light in the living room and used his handkerchief to turn the front door knob. Opening the door slowly and silently, he looked up and down the street and at the porches of the houses within sight. Stepping outside, he drew the door shut and pulled until the lock clicked. Swiftly, now, he went down the steps and back to his car.

He started the engine and drove past the house to the next intersection, and made a left turn. Three short blocks brought him to the main boulevard. After braking for the stop sign, he fished a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lighted it, his hands trembling and wet. He inhaled deeply, tossed the match out the window, and blew out a great sighing whoosh of smoke. Then he shifted into low and made another left turn . . .

Beside Detective Sergeant Joe Nichols's bed the phone rang. On the fourth ring he snagged it.

"Hello," he said drowsily.

"Joe," an apologetic voice said, "this is Regan."

"I work days," Joe said.

"I'm in tears," the voice told him.

"I know you are, Lieutenant. How can I make you stop crying?"

"You know Pete Humphrey, the desk man?"

"I ought to," Joe sighed. He looked at the clock on his dresser. It was 1:15 in the morning.

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"Well, he walked into a hell of a deal — got off work and found his wife dead in bed when he got home. You know his wife, don't you?"

"I've met her."

"Well, Pete just got off the phone. He was pretty upset — crying and all that sort of thing. He claims she was murdered and the thing set up as a suicide. You know how that goes."

"Yeah, I know."

"He wants you to investigate it."

"Oh, hell!" Joe said.

"I know how you feel, but I couldn't tell him no. He's a funny little guy, but a pretty good egg."

"He's a jerk," Joe said.

There was a short silence at the other end of the wire, then the lieutenant said hesitantly, "I can tell him I couldn't get hold of you."

"Oh, hell," Joe said again. "I'll go. What's the address?"

"I'll pick you up," Lieutenant Regan said, "Pete'll like it if I go, too — you know, the personal interest angle."

"Good enough."

"I'll be by in about five minutes."

"All right."

"Thanks, Joe."

"That's okay."

The wire clicked dead and Joe dropped the receiver back on the cradle and yawned. Then he climbed out of bed and padded down the hall to the bathroom. He washed his face in cold water, dried it; combed his hair and brushed his teeth. Returning to the bedroom, he lighted a cigarette and began to dress.

"This is it," Lieutenant Regan said, wheeling the police car to the curb in front of a gray stucco house.

"Nice little place," Joe observed. He got out of the car. Regan slid along the seat and climbed out on Joe's side.

Light seeped through the slats of Venetian blinds in the living room. They climbed the porch steps and the lieutenant placed a blunt forefinger against the doorbell. The door swung open as though actuated by the button.

"Come on in," Pete Humphrey said. He stood aside so they could enter, his arms stiff at his sides and his fists clenched. He had taken off his coat, but he still wore the extra belt around his waist that supported his service revolver, handcuff case, and spare-cartridge holder.

Lieutenant Regan dropped his hand on the little man's shoulder. "I'm sure sorry, Pete," he said gruffly.

The other nodded, chin quivering. Tears had left streaks down both sides of his long, thin nose, and they were still coming. He brushed at them with the back of one hand and snuffled.

"Thanks," he said automatically and then added, a pathetic gladness in his voice, "Hello, Joe."

"Hello, Pete," Joe said softly.

Pete snuffled again and preceded them down the hall to the bedroom. "Marge wouldn't kill herself," he said doggedly. "Somebody got her drunk and shot her. That's what happened.

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I want to know who did it, that's all." When they stood beside the bed, he looked down at the body and began to cry openly.

"You touch anything, Pete?" Joe asked gently.

The little man shook his head, sobbing.

Joe went around the room, his movements deliberate and slow, examining every portion of the rug, sending the beam of his flashlight to explore under bed, dressers, and table. Then he looked at the two windows and the walls. Next, he carefully went over the dressers, tables, and the bed itself, touching nothing, considering each square inch of surface independently. Last, he stood beside the bed and ran his gaze over the body, from head to toe.

"Was she right-handed, Pete?" he asked.

The little man nodded, his sobs quieted.

"Where did the gun come from?"

"I kept it in that drawer," Pete pointed to the bedside table.

"Did she know how to use it?"

Pete Humphrey nodded again.

Joe Nichols went out into the hall and probed the carpet and walls with his flashlight. He explored the dining room, the kitchen, with the open bottle and empty glass on the sink, and the living room, the other two men at his heels. Near the couch, he turned and faced them.

"That pencil in the bedroom, Pete — was there a note?"

The little man looked startled and his hand went up to his uniform shirt pocket.

"She left a note," he admitted. "I got it here." He patted the pocket. "I put it in an envelope — to preserve the prints."

Lieutenant Regan sighed. "I thought you said you didn't touch anything."

"That's the only thing I touched."

"Well, what did the note say?"

Pete Humphrey's lips quivered. "She just said, 'Dear Pete, I can't stand it any longer. It's not your fault — I just can't go on like this any longer. Goodbye forever.' "

The lieutenant sighed again. "Well, is it in her handwriting?"

"She — she wrote it all right," the little man said, "but somebody made her do it."

"Now, Pete," Regan protested patiently, "don't you think you're going overboard a bit?"

"I knew you'd think that," Pete Humphrey said, triumph gathering on his face. He looked from the lieutenant to Joe and back again. There was a gleam of pride in his watering eyes. "You want to know what first made me suspicious?"

"Yeah, we do," Regan said, his voice tired.

"All right, come back into the kitchen." Pete's voice was tinged with excitement. He shivered with it.

"Look at the drawers!" he said, when they had followed him into the kitchen. His thin chest rose and fell with his rapid breathing. "All open! Marge just wouldn't close drawers! In the bedroom, too!"

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They followed him down the hall to the bedroom. He did not even look at the body on the bed.

"Look at her dresser — every drawer open. And look at the top drawer of mine! That's where she got the pencil and paper. Now look at the drawer where the gun was! Why would she close *that* one?"

Lieutenant Regan sat down on the vanity seat and lighted a cigarette. He caught Joe's eye and winked.

"It could happen that way, Pete," he said.

"You don't know Marge," the little man said stubbornly, "She *never* closed drawers!"

"It isn't much to go on," Regan said skeptically.

"There's the note," Pete told him. "Murderers get nervous and their hands sweat. Isn't that right, Joe?"

Joe Nichols nodded.

"I read that in a book," Pete Humphrey said humbly. "I always wanted to be a detective." He looked at Regan.

The lieutenant flushed angrily. "Everybody can't be a detective," he said shortly.

"I know that — I ain't blaming anybody," Pete said respectfully. "Anyway, the paper she wrote on is from one of the pads we use down at the station. It's that slick stuff — it'll take prints."

"Look, Pete," Lieutenant Regan said, patient again, "If she was the one who got the paper — and she wrote the note — the only prints we'll find will be hers."

"She didn't finish writing," Pete Humphrey told him, triumph returning to his face. "There's a pencil mark at the bottom — like somebody pulled the paper out from under the pencil."

Regan thought it over. "All right," he said finally. "Give it to me and I'll have the Lab check it for prints."

The little man's hand moved up to his breast pocket again and stayed there.

"I'd like to take it in myself," he said, his gaze on Regan.

The lieutenant's face reddened. "I'll see that it gets checked — if that's what's worrying you." He reached out his hand.

Pete Humphrey began to cry again. "You guys don't think it *was* murder. I'll feel a lot better if I take it up myself. It don't matter who takes it. It's okay with you, Joe, ain't it?"

"Sure, it's all right with me, Pete," Joe said quietly. He turned to Regan. "We better get the Lab out here and have them go over the whole place."

"Yeah, we want Pete to be satisfied," Regan assented bitterly, "I'll see you out in the car." He got up, crushed out his cigarette in a glass dish filled with bobby pins, and stalked from the room.

"What's your address here, Pete?" Joe Nichols asked.

"Thirteen-oh-nine West 77th Place," the little man told him. He was looking at the body again, teeth sunk into his lower lip

Joe went into the living room and dialed the City Hall operator. "Crime Lab," he said softly.

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The operator said 'thank you,' her voice listless. The line clicked, then buzzed softly — once — twice — another click.

"Crime Lab, Jones," a man's metallic voice said.

"Joe Nichols, Sam. How's with you?"

"All right — up to now. What've you got?"

"We don't know for sure — murder maybe. It's Pete Humphrey's wife. We want the works."

"The desk man?"

"That's right."

"Jeez, that's tough! We'll do a job. What's the address?"

Joe gave it to him and added, "There's a note you'd better check — before it's turned over to the coroner. Pete'll go in with you."

"Good enough. We'll be right out. Pretty rough on Humphrey, huh?"

"You said it."

"You call the coroner?"

"Not yet."

"We'll do it, when we're through. That'll give us a little time to work."

"Swell," Joe said. He replaced the receiver and turned to face the other man. "They'll dust the whole place — pictures — everything. Ask them to make a paraffin test of her hand, too — to see if the gun was in it when it was fired."

"They won't find anything wrong," Pete Humphrey said, his face twitching, "except the note. It wasn't just anybody who did this," he added meaningfully.

Joe waited, his eyes patient. Emotion writhed across the other's features. "I'm going to have the prints on the note checked against every policeman on the job — from the chief on down," Pete said then. "Somebody who knew things did this."

Joe nodded quietly. "Well, we'll run along, Pete. You'll be all right, won't you?"

"Sure, Joe. Thanks for coming."

Joe nodded again and went on out. The dull glow of a cigarette came from inside the police car. Regan started the engine as Joe climbed in and closed the door. The lieutenant threw the car in gear and pulled away from the curb. They rode in silence for several blocks, then Joe said, "Pete thinks a policeman did it."

Lieutenant Regan's arms stiffened on the wheel. Then he began to curse in a monotonous undertone. The light from a street lamp showed his face gray-white with strain.

"Well, you got the idea, didn't you, Joe?"

"How's that?"

"He thinks I did it."

"He's upset," Joe said.

"Yeah, but his little mind is working!" Regan ground out savagely.

Joe Nichols lighted a cigarette and smoked quietly.

"You know," the lieutenant said finally, "I did some thinking while I was waiting for you to come out."

Joe said nothing and Regan began again.

"He's been after me to bring him up into the Detective Bureau for years. It's been a phobia with him.

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Lord only knows how many books he's read on investigation."

"He's always reading," Joe agreed.

"He's got it in for me, too. If she was murdered, I bet he did it himself. What bothers me is how far he would go to try and pin it on me."

"That would be pretty hard," Joe said.

"Maybe so," the other admitted sullenly, "but it just happens I've been slipping away from the station for an hour or two every night — the last couple of weeks — and that little twerp knows it!"

Joe tossed his cigarette out the window and a trail of sparks swept the length of the car. "That isn't much evidence," he said.

Lieutenant Regan squirmed in the car seat. "Yeah, but it puts me in a hell of a spot. If I have to open up on where I've been, I'll be through — it's one of those deals."

He wheeled the car to the curb in front of Joe's bungalow and stopped. Joe opened the door and got out. Regan looked at the dark bungalow.

"Jane back yet?" he asked.

"No, she decided to take the train. She's due this afternoon."

"Say hello for me."

"Okay."

Regan leaned forward on the steering wheel, his face moody.

"Listen, you don't have anything to worry about," Joe said.

"That's easy for you to say!" the lieutenant said bitterly. "You aren't on a spot. When a guy has as much time on the job as I have, there isn't any starting over. A deal like this stays with you — wherever you go."

"You're forgetting the note," Joe said.

"Hell, there isn't a chance in the world that the murderer touched that note. You know that."

"He might have."

Regan's face was still glum. He began to pull away and Joe shut the car door. The lieutenant gunned the engine in low, jammed the gears into second, and took a corner with tires squealing. Joe Nichols watched the car disappear from view, unlocked his door and went inside.

An early morning wind was billowing the curtains in the bedroom. He closed the window, drew the blind, and switched on the reading lamp at the head of the bed. Taking off his coat, he tossed it over a chair. After that, he stood in front of his dresser, looking at himself in the mirror.

He stood there for some time.

The lieutenant was a good guy — he'd always leveled with Joe Nichols.

Jane was due back this afternoon.

Yeah, Regan was a good guy. It would be tough if —

And Jane. Both ways it was going to be tough.

Finally Joe Nichols drew out the .38 detective special from its snug shoulder holster, cocked it, placed the muzzle against his head, back of his right ear, and pulled the trigger.

Black Mask *section continued on next page*

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Black Mask Magazine . . .

What kind of story do you usually expect from Black Mask? That's easy: a hardboiled, hammer-and-tongs 'tec, full of a curious blend of introspection and action. Well, here is a Black Mask reprint that lives up to those expectations. And it revolves around Black Mask-type characters too: the rough-tough unscrupulous police reporter who has at least one soft spot in his heart, the dreamboat of a night-club singer who has at least one soft spot in her head, and a touching assortment of hijackers, doublecrossers, and crooked cops.

But Black Mask had its surprises too. Sometimes the surprises were in the stories, sometimes they were in the authors' names. It is no longer a surprise to learn that writers like Dashiell Hammett, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Raymond Chandler cut their private-eye teeth in the pages of BM. But here is a yarn — straight, 100 proof Black Mask — written by so unexpected a contributor to the hardboiled school as — Norman Katkov!

Mr. Katkov came to the United States at an early age, went to school in St. Paul, Minnesota, got his B.A. from the University of Minnesota, became a reporter and feature writer for the "St. Paul Pioneer-Press" and later for the "New York World-Telegram," wrote stories for many national magazines, including the "Saturday Evening Post," "Cosmopolitan," and "Collier's," worked in Hollywood as a script-writer, and published two novels that you will remember caused quite a stir — EAGLE AT MY EYES *and* A LITTLE SLEEP, A LITTLE SLUMBER. *His most recent book is that lively biography,* THE FABULOUS FANNY *— the story of Fanny Brice.*

Yes, you've got to admit it: Norman Katkov turning up in Black Mask is quite a surprise!

THE FIX

by NORMAN KATKOV

I WAS LYING ON MY STOMACH, MY arms stretched out, my head in Ma's lap. To the left of us the bathing beach was infested with the usual Saturday crowd. Here in a clump of trees across from the Phalen Park bandstand, Ma and I shared a wide swatch of lawn with a woman and two

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kids who were off by themselves eating popcorn.

I was wearing huaraches and white cotton trunks and I had my eyes closed, calling myself 57 kinds of a jerk for having gone for $1500 in that Minneapolis crap game the night before. Ma was rubbing my back with suntan oil when I heard the soft, chiming thing Frank Fenton used for a horn on his car. I was due at work in an hour and a half and I wanted to see Fenton about as much as I wanted to see a hole in the head.

He sounded it again. Damn him, and damn those slobs who were always bothering me! He knew that when I was with my Ma I didn't want any truck with them. Why the hell didn't he wait until I got down to police headquarters before he came running around for something?

I got up slowly. I saw the limousine parked behind my roadster and Fenton's hand waving at me from the back seat. Ma looked up at me, and I squatted like a baseball catcher, took her hand in mine, and kissed her fingers.

"Some friends of mine," I explained.

"They don't need police reporters in the park," she protested.

"I'll just say hello. You sit here."

I reached for my pants to slip on over my trunks, then changed my mind and dropped them. I knew what Fenton wanted, and it wasn't going to take me long to get rid of him.

Four days before somebody had hijacked a truckload of liquor on its way from the freight car to a warehouse in Minneapolis. The drivers had stopped near the city limits for some coffee and somebody had pulled out with the load. It didn't amount to a lot of dough, but a hijacking is a hijacking. That night the cops picked up a petty larceny thief named Paul Ellis trying to get rid of the rig near Mendota. They'd pinched him, but for four days the best they could get out of him was that he was driving the hack. There was only one joker — the truck was empty.

The law figured it was Fenton, and I knew it was Fenton, but neither of us had been able to get anything on it. And sooner or later Ellis would start talking.

The door opened as I walked to the car. Hank Grew was in the driver's seat, his killer's face as cold as the metal of the gun he loved to use. I had one foot on the running board when I saw her. I suddenly wished I had brought the pants. It was chilly with the breeze from the lake.

I knew her right off. She was the one I always danced with at night in the living room of the apartment, a pillow in my arms, some good, soft music coming from the radio. She was the one I thought of early in the morning, when I would lie in bed with a cigarette and think of walking into a party or a night club in town, and people turning to say, "There's Danny Nyack and his girl. Don't they look good together?" She even looked the way I thought she would

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— tanned a deep golden brown, and wearing a little girl's dirndl, anklets, and beach shoes.

Her eyes and mine were having a tête-à-tête when Fenton cut in. "How's it, Danny?" I didn't like Fenton. He was small and mean and too crooked, and now with the girl beside him I had another reason for not liking him.

"Peaches and cream, Frank." He took my arm and pulled me into the car between him and Miss Lovely Legs.

"You'll catch cold, Danny boy," he murmured.

"Stay away from me," I warned. "I'm as slippery as a greased pig."

She laughed and now I was absolutely sure she was the one. "I've heard people say that very thing about you, Mr. Nyack."

Fenton leaned over. "Danny, this is Lois Phillipa, my new vocalist at the Bowl." Her hand in mine was soft and warm. I held it until Fenton pulled my arm, and from the way he looked at her and at me, I knew immediately that he was stuck on the girl himself.

"Danny," he said, "I want you to get to Paul Ellis."

"Sure," I said, nodding. "A cinch. Anything you want from the governor while I'm at it?"

"Danny, you got to."

"With what? A crowbar? They've got him in the hole upstairs, Frank."

"I know where they've got him," the little man said. "I've had lawyers trying to get to him since he was pinched and they put him away."

The coppers hadn't booked Ellis, and Fenton could whistle for all the good his lawyers would do him.

"I can't do it, Frank." I could feel the girl next to me, and I knew then that I was going to see her again and if Fenton didn't like it, then Fenton didn't like it. "Jim Dorsey needs a pinch and he'll hang on to Ellis till he gets it."

The little guy at my side seemed to hiss the words, "Dorsey hasn't got a prayer. Paul won't say boo and Dorsey knows it."

I could hear Lois breathing in the heat and I turned to her, but Frank had my arm again. "Danny, I want you to get to him. Tell him to plead guilty to stealing the truck. Tell him there'll be ten grand waiting for him when he gets out. The most they can give him is a workhouse rap. A year and a day. Tell Dorsey he can pick up the liquor any time he wants to. The whole thing is getting too hot and I want out." Fenton paused. "The liquor is in that wood warehouse at State and Chicago."

I didn't like anybody ordering me about. I didn't like Fenton talking like a sergeant and I didn't like him being with this girl, and I didn't like that murderer, Grew, in the front seat. I turned to Lois.

"See you again, eh, Lois?" I moved carefully over Fenton's feet. When I turned and shut the door, he was fumbling with his billfold.

"Wait, Danny." Then I saw the two small pieces of white paper that

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Fenton held like a magician showing cards to an audience after finishing a trick. I leaned over the window sill.

"These your markers, Danny?"

That's what I get for giving people IOUs. "I gave those to John Otis in Minneapolis last night," I answered.

"John gave them to me."

"All right. All right. You'll get it. They're for $1500. I'll have it for you Monday."

Fenton shook his head. "Tonight, Danny. Come into the Bowl tonight and rip them up yourself. Just give me the word from Paul." For that $1500 I could send Ma to California like a queen. And there was the girl.

"I'll think about it," I promised.

"That's it, Danny. You think about it." Fenton smiled at me. "Say hello to your mother, Danny. I like her."

"Sure. Take care of Miss Phillipa. I like her." I turned to the girl. "Ever go swimming at midnight, Lois?"

"Not with police reporters."

"We'll fix that." I rapped the side of the door twice with my knuckles and walked toward Ma. When I got there, I saw she was asleep. I bent and kissed her forehead and she woke up.

"Baby, I got some business. What do you want to do — stay here, see a movie, or go for a ride? I'll have one of Phil Biddle's cabbies take you riding." She held out her arms and I helped her up. When I brushed the grass from her dress, she turned and whacked me, then grabbed me and kissed my cheek.

"Take me home, Danny. I'm tired."

It was twenty minutes to 4 when we got in the roadster, and it was twenty minutes after 5 when I pulled into a No Parking space at Seventh and Robert. I told the copper on the corner to watch the car and spent the next ten minutes at a ladies' beach apparel counter in a department store. A glass of iced tea and some wafers took another ten minutes and when I walked through the door of police headquarters and into the big room where Jack Johnson sat in the desk sergeant's chair, it was three minutes to 6.

I unbuttoned the collar of my sports shirt, sat down at my desk, which lay to the left of Johnson's, and spent a half hour earning the $15 the paper paid me for working each night. After calls to the record room, the ambulance driver, the fire board, the hospitals, and the coroner's office I had four heat prostrations, a drowning, and a hit-and-run case. I called my city desk, gave them to the rewrite man, and asked for George Hewitt, the city editor.

"George? Danny. George, there might be something big on that liquor hijack. Well, I don't know yet." I listened to him explode. "Sure, I'm working for you, for Pete's sake. Somebody told me Paul Ellis pulled that thing alone." I listened. "All right, what do you care if he didn't? If he says so and the law says so, isn't that good enough for

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you?" We went on with this pleasant little conversation for five minutes and finally he said he'd have to have it by 10:30.

Johnson was making trout flies when I walked out. "Where's Blubber?" I asked. Johnson pointed a fly at the door. I walked through the room, turned to my left, and stopped before a glazed door which I opened with one hand while I knocked with the other.

Jim Dorsey, the captain of detectives, was a big guy. Now there are lots of big guys and there are just as many soft ones as hard ones, but this man was rough. He'd been lots tougher when he was younger, but even now he was the one man in the department I always wanted on my side. He was sitting at his desk dunking crackers into a glass of milk.

I sat down across from him. "How's the ulcers, Jim?"

"You should have them." See? A nice guy, a real nice fellow.

"Jim, listen," I said. "How badly do you want to close the door on that liquor thing?"

"You and Hewitt should know." He raised a cracker to his lips. "You've been giving the department so damn much heat I think I'd be better off pounding a beat."

"Jim, I want to see Paul Ellis." There was no use playing prologues with this guy.

"No."

"Jim, let me talk to him. It won't do you any harm, I promise you."

He pushed back the brim of his hat. "Kid, I've watched you for twelve years and you're no good. Take it from me you're no good. You've sweet-talked everybody and everything in this town, but you'll never get to me. Believe that. You never will." He drank the milk and put the glass in a drawer. "What happens when you see him?"

"He'll admit stealing the truck. He'll tell me he was drunk and took it for the laughs."

Dorsey twisted in his seat. "The liquor?" I always felt better when he saw the dollar sign.

"There's 100 cases of Scotch in that wood warehouse down on State and Chicago. You've got a pinch, you've got a fall guy, and you'll just look for the thieves who cached the liquor."

"What am I gonna do with ten cases of Scotch?" he growled.

I saw what he was getting at. "Frank Fenton will pay $50 a case for it."

He shook his head at me, smiling. "One of the turnkeys goes to lunch at 8," he said. "Go on up five minutes later." He took a key from his ring. "I'll have the other jailer down here. Tell Johnson you're going up to check the records."

The phone rang and he picked the receiver off the hook and listened. "For you, kid. In your office."

I thought it might be Hewitt but it was Ma on the other end of the line. "Danny," she said reprovingly, "you shouldn't have sent so much ice cream. I'm keeping the cab driver here

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to help me eat it. There's so much."

"What do you mean?"

"One of Phil Biddle's drivers brought me several quarts of ice cream. There's so much and it's such a hot night that I asked him to eat it with me."

"Put him on the phone, Ma," I ordered. I knew who it was. I knew damn well who it was, but I had to make sure.

"Hello, Dan." It was Grew all right. "It's a hot night, Dan, and the boss told me to be sure and stop by your mother's house. He said to keep her company in case she wanted to go for a ride or something."

He hung up on me. I could see him, that twitchy-handed killer, sitting in the kitchen with Ma. Fenton shouldn't have done that. Anyone but Ma. Not her.

I sat at my desk folding sheets of copy paper until I had me a little stack of small, rectangular pieces. That was a long wait, make no mistake, and I felt, waiting there, the way I used to when I would wait to go into confessional . . .

The elevator opened onto the jail doors, one side for women and kids, the other for the men. I took a chair and set it so that the door couldn't close and used the key in the barred door. Walking along the row of cells, the drunks gave me the business: "Pretty boy," "Hello, flatfoot," "Get me outta here . . ."

I went along to the hole, which is the same as the other cells except that there is only a peephole for light instead of the bars on the other cubicles.

"Ellis?" I had my mouth to the peephole, trying to see in the dark.

"Hunh?" Paul had a broken lip or some damn thing and also some trouble with his nose, so that when he talked it was like a fighter working out in the ring. He kept snorting as though he had a mouthpiece between his teeth and was breathing through his nose.

"Danny Nyack."

"Git t' hell outta here."

"Frank Fenton sent me up, Paul. I'm coming in."

Inside, Paul was lying on the bunk and I beamed my pen flashlight on the floor for a few minutes before I turned the switch in the hall, giving him a chance to get accustomed to the glare. He didn't look too good, but he didn't look as bad as I thought he would.

I kept one foot in the door and sat on the toilet seat. "How you feeling, Paul?" I asked. I was busy writing on the small squares of paper I'd torn in my office while he nodded and watched me. If I knew Dorsey, this place was wired and what I had to say to this bird, after that call from Ma, was strictly between him and me.

I wrote as fast as I could, meanwhile talking to Paul, telling him that things were going to be all right, and that he would have a good lawyer, and all the rest. I got one note written and passed it over to him:

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Fenton says (I had written) *that you take the rap for stealing the truck, and you'll get a year and a day. He'll have $7,500 for you the day you get out.*

He took the pen from me and wrote on the back: *How do I know I get the dough and how do I know he won't rat on me and leave me with a grand larceny rap?*

Just the way I'd rehearsed it. I changed the conversation to fishing and told him there was a lot of pike coming out of the St. Croix. Meanwhile I wrote this:

I, Paul Ellis, hereby swear that Frank Fenton, owner of the "Bowl," originated the plan and persuaded me to hijack the truck of the Midland Liquor Co., and have been promised $7,500 to serve a jail sentence for the truck stealing with the full knowledge of Frank Fenton.

I left a space for his signature and copied it on another piece of paper. Then I had him sign both of them. I wrote him another note telling him I'd give one to his wife, while I talked about the local ball club. I gave him my pack of cigarettes and he lighted one up and took a deep drag. We shook hands and I asked him if there was anything else he wanted, and he said no.

The chair was still in the elevator door. I rode downstairs. Johnson was sleeping on the desk. I walked behind him and around the back, through the garage, and into a side door to Jim's office.

I sat down and began filing my nails. "Well?" he asked.

I nodded at him.

"Well?" he asked again.

"I'm going to tell Hewitt he'll be arraigned in the morning on the truck stealing. He was drunk, he picked up the truck in Mendota, and he was pinched with it. He didn't and doesn't know anything about the liquor. If you want to go down for the booze now, let me get photographers there for the paper." I didn't want to waste time — I had to phone Fenton.

Dorsey smiled and bent over to take my hand. I figured he was pleased about the pictures, and so I gave him my hand. The next thing I knew he'd pulled me over so that I was sprawled across the top, his face right up next to mine.

"What'd you tell Ellis?" he growled.

The rat was crushing my hand. "Nothin' for cripes' sakes. Let go my hand, you're breaking it!"

He pushed me back across the desk and fixed his hat on his head. Then he pointed his finger at me. "All right, kid. You know what you're doing."

"I've got to call the paper," I said. "I'll meet you in the garage in five minutes."

I couldn't get to my office fast enough. I'd never used a gun in my life, but if anything happened to Ma I'd kill Fenton and Grew and any other rat who was mixed up with it.

When Fenton answered the phone, all he said was: "Hello, Danny-boy."

"Frank, get that killer out of my house."

"Sure, Dan."

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"Get him out, Frank, or I'll kill the b——."

I was a fool to lose my head, but there wasn't a thing in this world that meant anything to me but my old lady.

"Sure, Dan. By the way, did you see that party?"

"I saw him and I'm calling my paper now. And I'll see you about midnight."

"All right, Danny. I'll call Hank now. You know what I think of your mother, Dan."

I hung up on him. The rat, coming into my own home!

I called Hewitt, gave him all of it, and told him to send a photographer over to get shots of the liquor for the afternoon paper — it would be too late for us. I woke up Johnson and told him to take care of the photographer, and wait out in the garage, while I waited for Dorsey, I called Ma. She wanted to bend my ear about what a nice man the fellow was who had brought her the ice cream, but as soon as I found out he was gone I cut it short.

We drove in my car. Johnson sat beside me, his hat down over his eyes. The warehouse was a long, low, dark building out in the corner of a meadow that was still used for grazing land by Polish families who kept cows and chickens. I pulled the car up alongside a door. We tried to break it, but Jim motioned me away and shot the lock off. The liquor was there, and we had ten cases in the roadster in ten minutes without spilling a drop.

There was a photographer at the station. Jim got a dozen dicks pulled in off the streets. I called Hewitt and asked him if he wanted me to go down with the photographer and he said to suit myself.

I sat smoking in my office until Jim came in. I shut the door behind him, and he called his old lady to tell her I'd be out to leave some fishing stuff in the garage. He gave me a key. I got a pair of clean coveralls from the mechanic in the garage and put them on. Driving out to Jim's house, I stopped at a florist's and told him to send a dozen roses over to the Bowl. I drew a picture of a man and woman in swim suits on a card, and enclosed it.

I had a drink with Mrs. Dorsey and got out of the house fast when she turned on some soft music and asked me to sit around a while. She was a small blonde with full lips and a big nose, and why the hell she had ever married a guy like Jim Dorsey I'll never be able to figure out.

I drove off a few blocks, parked the car, and got a screw driver out of the glove compartment. Then I pried off the hub cap, wrapped one of the slips Pete had signed in a handkerchief, and laying it in the hub cap, slammed it back on the wheel.

It was just midnight by the clock on the sign at Seven Corners when I got back down into the Loop. I drove the roadster into the police garage and gave one of the ambulance drivers a buck to wash it for me. Lynn James,

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the county attorney, was there, also Dorsey and our photographer, and the liquor — all of it there in the garage with the two of them posing around it.

I'll be damned if I'll ever be able to figure out what it is about a news camera that gets these guys crazy. Afraid the voters will forget them, I suppose.

I sent the photographer back to the office. Inside, I called the fire board and checked my sources again.

Then I telephoned George Hewitt and told him there was nothing doing. He asked me if I wanted to eat some ribs with him and his wife, and I answered that I'd promised to get home early. I buttoned the collar of my sports shirt and locked the office.

The people in the Bowl were like fighters in the last round. They knew the place was closing in a half hour and they were really trying to get good and drunk before the lights went out, the way two pugs will give their all to show the judges they're still full of fight. I said hello to a few people and weaved my way through the place to Fenton's office. It was a tiny room, with liquor stacked along the sides and a few chairs around a roll-top desk. My roses were sprawled over the top of the desk, like flowers on a casket. Hank Grew lounged in a chair and Lois's hand covered the bald spot atop Fenton's head. She was wearing the dirndl again, and right then I had as much intention of going straight home to Ma as I had of kissing Jim Dorsey.

"All through for the night, darling?" I asked sweetly.

"All through singing." Her hand stayed where it was.

"What's it going to be, Danny?" Fenton asked.

"How about Lois?"

"Don't worry your head about Lois."

I wasn't worried, I said to myself. I wasn't worried about a damn thing. I was still for a minute, and in the small room all you could hear was the noise from the bar outside, like the noise from a football stadium when you're about a mile away.

"You don't want to be hot about Hank." Fenton smiled. "We just wanted to get your Ma some ice cream."

"Tell him to get some for himself now," I said. Fenton jerked a thumb and Grew oozed out of the chair and sauntered casually out of the room.

"The markers," I said. Fenton got the IOU's out of the billfold and I tore them up. "Ellis said all right," I added. "The papers will be out with it in half an hour. He'll be arraigned in the morning. I told Jim Dorsey you'd take ten cases of Scotch off his hands for $50 per."

Fenton nodded.

"And Frank," I added. "One thing more. I told Paul you'd have $7500 for him when he gets out." Fenton's face matched the color of the roses on the desk.

He got up and started for me, and then changed his mind all of a sudden and sat down again.

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"You shouldn't have sent Grew to see Ma," I reminded him. I gave him the note Paul had signed.

"If I say no?" he asked.

"Say no," I prompted. "Say no, you crummy creep!" I didn't think he'd take all that but he did.

"I'll give you a G-note, Danny."

I turned to Lois. "My car is out in front. In the glove compartment there's a box with three swim suits. One of them should fit." I smiled at her. "We'll go swimming. My Ma says I can stay out late tonight."

"Beat it."

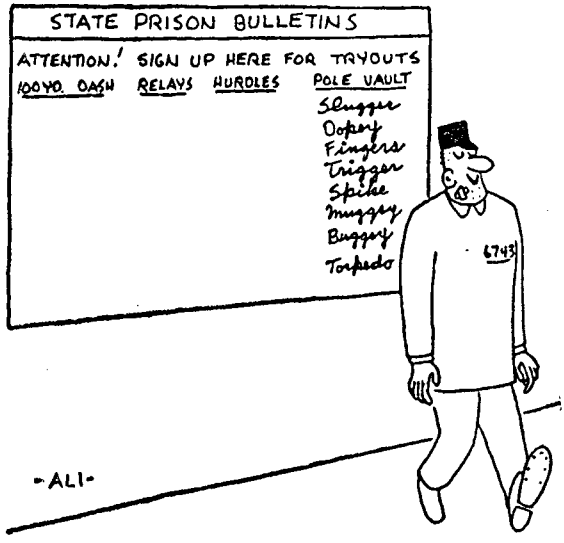
Have you ever heard a cat spit when she's backed up in a corner? That was Lois.

"You're kidding."

"Beat it," she repeated. Her hand was still covering the bald spot. I told Frank to send the money over to the station the next night and then I beat it. I stopped on Sixth and Wabash for fresh doughnuts and a quart of milk. I should have known it would turn out like that.

I put the roadster in the garage behind the apartment. Ma was asleep. I got a glass of milk and a doughnut and walked into the living room. I listened to the radio for a few minutes and then they put on a slow waltz. I almost jumped across the room to turn the dial.

The cheap floozie. Doublecrossing me like that for a baldheaded saloon keeper.



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John Galsworthy was the third English writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. He followed Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw, both of whom also wrote tales of crime and detection. Mr. Galsworthy's masterpiece — the novels and short stories which comprise THE FORSYTE SAGA *— is a landmark in modern fiction. Frank Harris once described the characteristic expression on John Galsworthy's face in two words: "seriousness" and "sincerity." The same two words can be applied to everything Mr. Galsworthy has written — seriousness and sincerity mixed with a profound understanding of the British people. You will find these qualities in "The Neighbors," and also something else: a profound understanding of the forces that entwine people in the "fell clutch of circumstance," and an equally profound sense of pity for those deep-rooted passions that flesh is heir to and that eventually drag people over the edge of tragedy . . .*

THE NEIGHBORS

by JOHN GALSWORTHY

IN THE REMOTE COUNTRY, NATURE, at first sight so serene, so simple, will soon intrude on her observer a strange discomfort; a feeling that some familiar spirit haunts the old lanes, rocks, wasteland, and trees, and has the power to twist all living things around into some special shape befitting its genius.

When moonlight floods the patch of moorland about the centre of the triangle between the little towns of Hartland, Torrington, and Holsworthy, a pagan spirit steals forth through the wan gorse; gliding round the stems of the lonely, gibbetlike fir trees, peeping out among the reeds of the white marsh. That spirit has the eyes of a borderer, who perceives in every man a possible foe. And, in fact, this high corner of the land has remained border to this day, where the masterful, acquisitive invader from the North dwells side by side with the unstable, proud, quick-blooded Celt-Iberian.

In two cottages crowning some fallow land two families used to live side by side. That long white dwelling seemed all one, till the eye, peering through the sweet-brier which smothered the right-hand half, perceived the rude, weather-beaten presentment of a Running Horse, denoting

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the presence of intoxicating liquors; and in a window of the left-hand half, that strange conglomeration of edibles and shoe-leather which proclaims the one shop of a primitive hamlet.

These married couples were by name Sandford at the eastern, and Leman at the western end; and he who saw them for the first time thought: "What splendid-looking people!"

They were all four above the average height, and all four as straight as darts. The innkeeper, Sandford, was a massive man, stolid, grave, light-eyed, with big fair mustaches, who might have stepped straight out of some Norseman's galley. Leman was lean and lathy, a regular Celt, with an amiable, shadowy, humorous face. The two women were as different as the men. Mrs. Sandford's fair, almost transparent cheeks colored easily, her eyes were gray, her hair pale brown; Mrs. Leman's hair was of a lustreless jet-black, her eyes the color of a peaty stream, and her cheeks had the close creamy texture of old ivory.

Those accustomed to their appearance soon noted the qualifications of their splendor. In Sandford, whom neither sun nor wind ever tanned, there was a look as if nothing would ever turn him from acquisition of what he had set his heart on; his eyes had the idealism of the worshipper of property, ever marching towards a heaven of great possessions. Followed by his cowering spaniel, he walked to his fields (for he farmed as well as kept the inn) with a tread that seemed to shake the lanes, disengaging an air of such heavy and complete insulation that even the birds were still. He rarely spoke. He was not popular. He was feared, no one quite knew why.

On Mrs. Sandford, for all her pink and white, sometimes girlish look, he had set the mark of his slow, heavy domination. Her voice was seldom heard. Once in a while, however, her reserve would yield to garrulity, as of water flowing through a broken dam. In these outbursts she usually spoke of her neighbors, the Lemans, deploring the state of their marital relations. "A woman," she would say, "must give way to a man sometimes; I've had to give way to Sandford myself, I have." Her lips, from long compression, had become thin as the edge of a teacup; all her character seemed to have been driven down below the surface of her long, china-white face. She had not broken, but she had chipped; her edges had become jagged, sharp. The consciousness, that she herself had been beaten to the earth, seemed to inspire in her that waspish feeling towards Mrs. Leman — "a woman with a proud temper," as she would say in her almost ladylike voice; "a woman who's never bowed down to a man — that's what she'll tell you herself. 'Tisn't the drink that makes Leman behave so mad, 'tis because she won't give way to him. We're glad to sell drink to anyone we can, of course; but 'tisn't that what's makin' Leman so queer. 'Tis her."

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Leman, whose long figure was often to be seen seated on the wooden bench of his neighbor's stone-flagged little inn, had, indeed, begun to have the soaked look and scent of a man never quite drunk, and hardly ever sober. He spoke slowly, his tongue seemed thickening; he no longer worked; his humorous, amiable face had grown hangdog and clouded. All the village knew of his passionate outbreaks, and bursts of desperate weeping; and of two occasions when Sandford had been compelled to wrest a razor from him. People took a morbid interest in this rapid deterioration, speaking of it with misgiving and relish, unanimous in their opinion that — "summat'd 'appen about that; the drink wer duin' for George Leman, *that* it wer, praaperly!"

But Sandford — that blond, ashy-looking Teuton — was not easy of approach, and no one cared to remonstrate with him; his taciturnity was too impressive, too impenetrable. Mrs. Leman, too, never complained. To see this black-haired woman, with her stoical, alluring face, come out for a breath of air, and stand in the sunlight, her baby in her arms, was to have looked on a very woman of the Britons. In conquering races the men, they say, are superior to the women; in conquered races, the women to the men. She was certainly superior to Leman. That woman might be bent and mangled, she could not be broken; her pride was too simple, too much a physical part of her. No one ever saw a word pass between her and Sandford. It was almost as if the old racial feelings of this borderland were pursuing in these two their unending conflict. For there they lived, side by side under the long, thatched roof, this great primitive, invading male, and that black-haired, lithe-limbed woman of an older race, avoiding each other, never speaking — as much too much for their own mates as they were, perhaps, worthy of each other.

In this lonely parish, houses stood far apart, yet news traveled down the May-scented lanes and over the whin-covered moor with a strange speed; blown perhaps by the west wind, whispered by the pagan genius of the place in his wanderings, or conveyed by small boys on large farm horses.

On Whit-Monday it was known that Leman had been drinking all Sunday; for he had been heard on Sunday night shouting out that his wife had robbed him, and that her children were not his. All next day he was seen sitting in the bar of the inn soaking steadily. Yet on Tuesday morning Mrs. Leman was serving in her shop as usual — a really noble figure, with that lustreless black hair of hers — very silent, and ever sweetening her eyes to her customers. Mrs. Sandford, in one of her bursts of garrulity, complained bitterly of the way her neighbors had "gone on" the night before. But unmoved, ashy, stolid as ever, Sandford worked in the most stony of his fields.

That hot, magnificent day wore to its end; a night of extraordinary

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beauty fell. In the gold moonlight the shadows of the lime-tree leaves lay, blacker than any velvet, piled one on the other at the foot of the little green. It was very warm. A cuckoo called on till nearly midnight. A great number of little moths were out; and the two broad meadows which fell away from the hamlet down to the stream were clothed in a glamorous haze of their own moonlit buttercups. Where that marvelous moonlight spread out across the moor it was all pale witchery; only the three pine trees had strength to resist the wan gold of their fair visitor, and brooded over the scene like the ghosts of three great gallows. The long white dwelling of "the neighbors," bathed in that vibrating glow, seemed to be exuding a refulgence of its own. Beyond the stream a nightjar hunted, whose fluttering harsh call tore the garment of the scent-laden still air. It was long before sleep folded her wings.

A little past 12 o'clock there was the sound of a double shot. By 5 o'clock next morning the news had already traveled far; and before 7, quite a concourse had gathered to watch two mounted constables take Leman on Sandford's pony to Bideford jail. The dead bodies of Sandford and Mrs. Leman lay — so report ran — in the locked bedroom at Leman's end of the neighbors' house. Mrs. Sandford, in a state of collapse, was being nursed at a neighboring cottage. The Leman children had been taken to the Rectory. Alone of the dwellers in those two cottages, Sandford's spaniel sat in a gleam of early sunlight under the eastern porch, with her nose fixed to the crack beneath the door.

It was vaguely known that Leman had "done for 'em"; of the how, the why, the when, all was conjecture. Nor was it till the assizes that the story of that night was made plain, from Leman's own evidence, read from a dirty piece of paper:

"I, George Leman, make this confession — so help me God! When I came up to bed that evening, I was far gone in liquor and so had been for two days off and on, which Sandford knows. My wife was in bed. I went up, and I said to her: 'Get up!' I said; 'do what I tell you for once!' 'I will not!' she said. So I pulled the bedclothes off her. When I saw her all white like that, with her black hair, it turned me queer, and I ran downstairs and got my gun, and loaded it. When I came upstairs again, she was against the door. I pushed, and she pushed back. She didn't call out, or say one word — but pushed; she was never one to be afraid. I was the stronger, and I pushed in the door. She stood up against the bed, defying me with her mouth tight shut, the way she had; and I put up my gun to shoot her. It was then that Sandford came running up the stairs and knocked the gun out of my hand with his stick. He hit me a blow over the heart with his fist, and I fell down against the wall, and couldn't move. And he said: 'Keep quiet!' he said,

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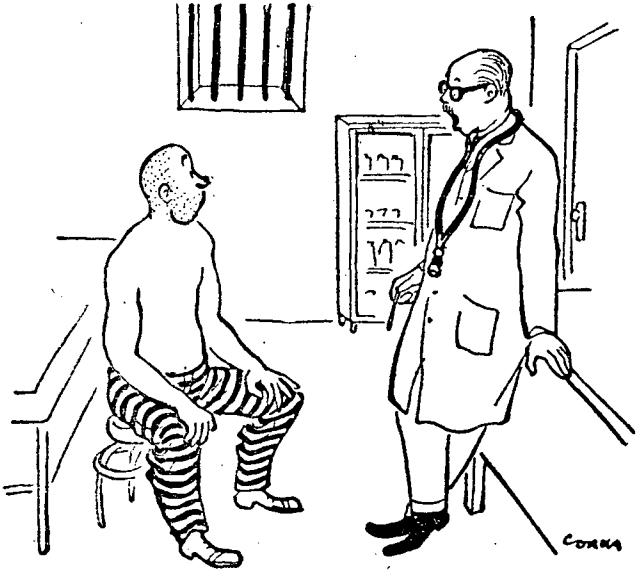
'you dog!' Then he looked at her. 'And as for you,' he said, 'you bring it on yourself! You can't bow down, can't you? *I'll* bow you down for once!' And he took and raised his stick. But he didn't strike her, he just looked at her in her nightdress, which was torn at the shoulders, and her black hair ragged. She never said a word, but smiled at him. Then he caught hold of her by the arms, and they stood there. I saw her eyes; they were as black as two sloes. He seemed to go all weak of a sudden, and white as the wall. It was like as they were struggling which was the better of them, meaning to come to one another at the end. I saw what was in them as clear as I see this paper. I got up and crept round, and I took the gun and pointed it, and pulled the triggers one after the other, and they fell dead, first him, then her; they fell quietly, neither of them made a noise. I went out, and lay down on the grass. They found me there when they came to take me. This is all I have to write, but it is true that I was far gone in liquor, which I had of him . . ."



"It makes me feel silly to say this — but you really should get away and go south for a few months."

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RIEN NE VA PLUS

by ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

WE WERE SITTING UNDER THE midsummer stars at Monte Carlo eating a soufflé and talking about suicide, when a passing newsmonger stopped at our table all aglow with the tidings that that young American with the white forelock had just been found crumpled on the beach, a bullet-hole in his heart. Earlier in the evening — it was shortly before we came out of the Casino in quest of dinner — we had all seen him wiped out by a final disastrous turn of the wheel. And now he lay dead on the shore.

I shall have to admit that the news gave a fillip to the occasion. It came towards the end of a long, luscious dinner on the terrace opposite the Casino. We were a casually assembled carful, who had driven over from Antibes in the late afternoon, planning to play a little roulette as an appetizer and then to dine interminably.

When we had arrived in the *Salles Privées* a few hours before, there was only standing room around our table at first. In this rapt fringe I encountered Sam Fletcher, a dawdling journalist who lived on occasional assignments from the Paris offices of American newspapers. He pointed out the notables to me. There was Mary Garden, for instance, playing intently, losing and winning, losing and winning, with that economy of emotional expenditure which one usually reserves for setting-up exercises. Then there was an English dowager who looked as though she were held together by adhesive type. She was betting parsimoniously, but Fletcher whispered to me that she lived in Monte Carlo on an ample allowance provided by her son-in-law, with the sole stipulation that she never embarrass the family by coming home. A moribund remittance woman. Next to her sat a pallid old gentleman whose hands, as they caressed his stack of counters, were conspicuously encased in braided gloves of gray silk. It seems that in his youth he had been a wastrel, and on her deathbed his mother had squeezed from him a solemn promise never to touch card or chip again as long as he lived.

As for young White Lock, there was, until his final bet, nothing else noticeable about him except that he was the only man then at the table wearing a dinner coat. We heard later that at first he had lost heavily and had had to make several trips to the *caisse* to replenish his supply of plaques. By the time I came along he had settled to a more cautious play but finally, as if from boredom, he took all his plaques and counters and

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stacked them on the red. To this pile he added, just as the wheel began to turn, the contents of his wallet—emptying out a small cascade of thousand-franc notes, with a single hundred-franc note among them. But this one he retrieved at the last moment as if to be sure of carfare home. There was that breathless spinning movement, then the fateful "*Rien ne va plus*," issuing in the same dead voice with which the intoning of the mass falls on infidel ears. Then the decision, "*Noir.*" Around that table you could hear the word for black being *exhaled* in every language the world has known since Babel.

The young man gave a little laugh as the *croupier* called the turn. He sat quite still as his last gauge was raked into the bank. With all eyes on him, he shoved his chair back from the table, reached for his wallet, took out the aforesaid hundred-franc note and pushed it, with white, fastidious fingers, toward the center of the patterned baize. "*Pour le personnel*," he said, with a kind of wry grandeur which hushed the usual twitter of thanks from the *croupiers.* "And that," he added, "is that." So saying, he got to his feet, yawned a little, and sauntered out of the room. I remember thinking, at the time, that he was behaving rather like any desperate young man in any Zoë Akins play. But it was a good performance. And now, it seemed, he lay dead by the water's edge.

It was Fletcher himself who brought the news. It came, I say, just as we were eating soufflé and talking of suicide. This, of course, was no obliging coincidence. One always tells tales of self-slaughter at Monte Carlo. It is part of the legend of the principality — as strong in its force of suggestion, I suppose, as the legend of Lourdes is strong in its hint to hysterics that the time has come to cast away their crutches. Fletcher told us that the sound of the shot had brought a watchman running. The youth lay on his back, his chin tilted to the stars, one outstretched hand limply holding the revolver, a dark stain on the pleated whiteness of his breast. Before Fletcher could wire his report to Paris, he would have to await certain — well — formalities. In a conspiratorial whisper, he explained there had been so many such suicides of late that a new rule was but recently put into effect. Whenever any client of the Casino was found self-slain with empty pockets, it was customary for the Casino to rush a bankroll to the spot before notifying the police, so that the victim would seem to have ended it all from *Weltschmerz.* Even now, Fletcher said, this trick must be in progress, and in the meantime he ought to be seeking such obituary data as might be gleaned in the registry office.

We were still lingering over our coffee when he came hurrying back to us, all bristling with the end of the story.

Notified in due course, the *gendarmerie* had repaired to the beach

(*Continued on page 64*)

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The Town Without a Straight Man could be any town Will Stanton has ever lived in. Yes, Mr. Stanton tells us that with a perfectly straight face. Wherever he has lived, he has always been told: "Understand you do some writing, young fella. Well, if it's characters you're after, you've come to the right place — yessireebob!" And Mr. Stanton always found that it was true. Why is it, the author wonders, that a community never seems to brag about its deacons and scoutmasters, but is always ready, willing, and able to talk about those citizens who have to take to the hills occasionally?

(You should have gathered by now that Will Stanton is a man with a delightfully curious turn of mind.)

To continue the author's notes on his prize-winning tale: the setting of the story actually exists. It can be located, says Mr. Stanton, a few miles north of San Francisco and slightly west of the United States. Not hard to get to at all: just take the narrow black road that runs by the lagoon — but shucks, why hurry you? Mr. Stanton has lived there for four years or so, and it was only recently that he realized that the number of local characters suggested to him for fictional use had come to exceed the census figures for the entire region.

Of course, it should be pointed out that none of the characters in the story actually resembles anyone Mr. Stanton has ever known — heaven forbid! And of the plot itself, Mr. Stanton is reminded of what a critic once said of Gulliver's travels: "For my part, I hardly believe a word of it." Now, we — your humble servants — would not go so far — indeed, we wouldn't. We followed the misfortunes of the representative of the U. S. Americana Corporation with as much amusement and amazement as we occasionally follow the fortunes of, say, U. S. Gypsum or U.S. Steel — and, we hasten to add, with as much credulity . . .

THE TOWN WITHOUT A STRAIGHT MAN

by WILL STANTON

THERE'S A NARROW BLACK ROAD that runs by the lagoon to the little old town by the sea. It's a pleasant, scenic ride, the two miles or so from the highway, with the sparkling water to the left and the graceful trees to the right, but the young man at the wheel of the

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foreign-made car had eyes only for the road ahead. Past the schoolhouse, past the church, down to the village street roared the car and came to a stop in front of the old saloon door.

The dust had hardly settled when across the street came a small boy drawing a wagon. He too came to a stop. The body of the car was yellow and the seats inside were green. The hub caps were adorned with silver rabbits, and the boy was a lover of small game. In a few moments he was scampering down the road, the wagon bouncing up and down, and the hub caps jingling merrily.

Inside the saloon the tall young man had just ordered a round of drinks. From his level-eyed gaze, his ready smile, and the casual way he slipped a crisp twenty from his snakeskin wallet and dropped it on the bar, it was plain to see that here was a man accustomed to meeting the public. A fool could have seen it.

Matt the bartender was no fool. "What line of business you follow?" he asked.

"Americana," the clean-cut chap replied. "I represent the U. S. Americana Corporation. Dealing in regional material of all sorts — local history, folk songs, traditions, humorous customs — things of that nature."

Harmon, the hulking redheaded fellow with the rain hat and gum boots, turned to stare at him. "What do you do with it?" he asked.

"Some we film, some we record. And of course all of it is copyrighted. That protects us, you see, so nobody else can use the material we purchase."

The thin-faced fellow in the grocer's apron leaned across in front of Harmon. "Like you take some little custom a fellow has been doing right along," he said, "and you put this here copyright to it. What's to stop him from doing it anyhow?"

Matt laughed thinly. "The government, Doc — they can put you in jail."

"Well now by gum," said Doc, "one of these days they're going to go too far."

The young man allowed his eyes to wander around the room — the naturally eager look on his face disguising his strong lack of interest. Time was when the taverns of the land were rich and fruitful with Americana, but no more. It occurred to him that perhaps this trip had been a mistake — the bar was only one more shabby replica of a thousand others in a thousand colorless towns. And yet Waldemar had assured him he was on the trail of something quite unusual. He cleared his throat in a companionable way, "What I'm after at the moment," he told them, "is a story on the wreckers along the coast here."

"Records?" Matt looked puzzled, "what kind of records you have in mind?"

"Not records, wreckers," the young man turned to include the others with his infectious laugh. "In the old days, you know, they used to put out false lights along the reefs to lure

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the ships closer and closer to the shore. Yes, indeed — "his voice took on a more authoritative ring as he warmed to his subject — "it's one of the most colorful divisions of Americana that we have. Why, entire communities used to depend on it for their livelihood."

"Nothing like that around here," said Harmon, wandering to the front of the bar and then leaning in the doorway, his bulky frame blotting out the opening. "Might be a few things wash up on the beach some times, but nothing like you said."

"No, no, of course — I'm not speaking of the present." The stranger had to frown to keep from smiling at the hulking man's childlike mistake.

"No," said Matt, "the only reason boats get wrecked along here is on account of the tides. Isn't that what you say, Harpy?" Matt turned towards his most elderly customer.

Harpy rubbed one shaking hand across the gray stubble on his chin. "Oh, yes, awful tricky tides along the reef," he raised his befuddled eyes to focus on the blond young man. "Must be 30 — 40 people drowned out there every year."

"Good heavens," the newcomer looked at him in astonishment. "Something ought to be done about that."

"Oh, yes." Harpy nodded his head wisely. "Now these local customs and whatnot you say you're looking for — you might try the post office. Likely they'd know if there's any such things going on. That's my advice to you Mr. What's your name."

"Palsey," the stranger said, "Gene Palsey. Well, thank you for the advice, but I suppose first I'd better get in touch with Mr. Waldemar. Perhaps one of you gentleman can tell me where he's staying?" He looked at the others expectantly. "Mr. Waldemar is one of our representatives," he explained after a moment of silence. "He's the one who dug up the story on the wreckers. He phoned in to the main office several days ago and said he was on his way out here."

Matt shook his head. "No other strangers around town that I know of. Chances are somebody took down the message wrong."

"But I talked to him myself and he said he was heading out here right away. He sounded very excited about it — he even made me promise not to breathe a word."

Harpy emptied his glass and set it gently on the bar. "You wouldn't be looking for a heavy-set fellow," he remarked, "short, kind of, and with a pair of real thick glasses on him."

"That's right," said Mr. Palsey eagerly. "That's Waldemar exactly. Do you know where he is?"

"I don't know where he is now," said Harpy. "It was three days ago when I see him, over to Hadesburg." He thought for a moment. "At the bus station, buying a ticket to Minneapolis."

"What?" Mr. Palsey stared at

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them with his mouth open. "Why, that's fantastic — he must have been out of his mind!"

"Just what I said," Harpy nodded. "He looked to me like a man that had lost his memory. I said so at the time."

Mr. Palsey opened his wallet, closed it again, and looked at his wrist watch. He appeared to be greatly agitated. "This is most distressing," he said, "very. I'd better get in touch with my office at once."

"Now don't rush off, Mr. Palsey," Matt put a restraining hand on his arm. "We'll have another drink all around and figure this out. Harpy," he turned toward him with a meaningful frown, "you don't know what you're talking about. You weren't in Hadesburg three days ago — why, you haven't been out of town in a week!"

"Did I say three days?" Harpy held out his glass. "Three weeks is what I meant." He looked at Mr. Palsey. "Now that I think of it, I don't believe this fellow was as stout as the one you're after. It may be that he looked sort of fat, but come right down to it and he was thin as a rail." He swallowed half his drink, wiping his mouth thoughtfully. "Skin and bones."

"One of the best Americana men in the country," Mr. Palsey murmured to himself. He looked over at the window and then down at the bar. "Now I don't know what to think," he said disconsolately.

"The main thing is not to worry," Matt said. "Chances are this Waldemar got himself a couple of drinks and went kiting off on some wild goose chase — in a day or so probably he'll come sneaking home. Those quiet fellows — they're real devils once they cut loose."

"He did sound awfully peculiar over the phone." Palsey seemed pathetically eager for almost any kind of advice. "Maybe there's something in what you say."

"You bet there is," Matt said. "The only thing bothers me is you making the trip way out here with nothing to show for it." He turned to look at the others. "Seems to me some of you could give Mr. Palsey a hand with this Americana stuff, seeing he's buying your drinks." Matt moved along the bar, refilling the empty glasses.

"Like the time Chet Olsen and old Amos got into a fight?" Doc asked suddenly. "That isn't what you want?"

Mr. Palsey hesitated, "Well, I'm afraid not —"

"It was some humorous local custom that started it," Harpy said, "and then they went at it on their tractors, singing folksongs all the while."

Harmon leaned over and cracked Harpy on the back of the neck. "You leave Doc tell it," he said.

"Hold on there!" Palsey had his notebook out and his gold pencil, his Americana training taking command. "Let me get this right from the start," he said firmly.

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"It was Amos's hogs started the trouble," Doc began, "getting into Chet's garden. Chet said he wanted to be a good neighbor and he didn't mind because his family was hungry for fresh pork anyway, and Amos said he wanted to be a good neighbor too, and the day Chet's widow and orphans et any of his pork there'd be a squarehead Swede hanging up in his smokehouse." Doc paused for a minute, studying his glass. "Well, I don't know that you'd care to hear any more — it's just a ordinary country story."

"Fine, fine," said Palsey, "keep going."

"Anyhow," said Doc, "next day the hogs turned up missing so Amos got his ax and went over to Chet's place. They was nobody home, but he could hear the hogs locked up in Chet's barn. He took the ax over to Chet's grindstone and worked on the edge till it suited him, and then he cut Chet a new barn door."

"Seven foot high," Harmon said, "and three foot wide."

"Then when the hogs come out, Amos saw they was one missing. Well, he always set quite a store by them hogs —"

"Never having no family of his own," Harpy said, "chick nor child."

"He was pretty riled up," Doc went on, "so he went around to the front porch and chopped the railing up in stove lengths. Then he done one thing and another around the place, and when Chet got home —"

"Him and the family had been over to Abalone Junction," Harmon said.

"So Chet and his oldest boy took the tractor over and snaked Amos' henhouse out to his back pasture and dumped it in the pond. Natural this got Amos worked up all over again."

"Him being in the henhouse at the time," said Harmon.

"Then Chet's woman really lit into him when he got home, said he had no call to be treating an old man that way. Chet said it would do the old buzzard good to cool off a spell. 'Well,' she says, 'here he comes now and he don't look very cool to me.' Chet looked up and sure enough there was Amos on *his* tractor dragging a couple of Chet's prize apple trees along behind. It was one of those old tractors the steamroller people used to put out, and it would do maybe 35–40 on a downgrade. Amos come into the barnyard standing up at the wheel with a scythe in one hand and his whiskers flying out to the side and green apples coming down like rain. Chet and his folks just stood there while Amos wheeled up to the porch. 'Thought you might like some applesass to go with that fresh pork,' Amos says."

"It goes good with pork," Harpy remarked, "some boiled potatoes and a nice mess of greens —"

"Well, sir, Chet reached behind the door for his shotgun and Amos got rolling again. One of the tree limbs caught Chet in back of the knees and the shotgun blowed two holes in the

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porch roof and Amos just kept going full tilt with Chet trying to climb out of the apple tree." He studied his empty glass. "So they tell me," he added.

"Marvelous!" Mr. Palsey was writing furiously. "A classic! I believe I've caught up now — what comes next?" he asked anxiously.

Doc took out his knife and began trimming his thumbnail. "Don't know as I ever heard," he said. "You, Harmon?" Harmon shook his head.

"Seems to me one of them got his neck broke," said Harpy, "but I don't just recall off-hand."

Mr. Palsey looked from one to the other in some bewilderment. "But you couldn't forget a thing like that — it's impossible!"

"I know the very man can tell you all about it," said Matt. "Name of Ritter. I don't know how come I didn't think of him before. You say you're buying another round?"

"Yes, of course." Palsey studied his notebook unhappily. "You knew the first part so well — I can't understand it."

Matt picked up the money from the bar and made change. "Now, this fellow I was telling you about," he said, "you've got to approach him just the right way. He's kind of notional. A while back he got hold of a machine that would print Confederate money — kept it in a cave way up in the hills somewhere —"

Palsey stared at his notebook a minute longer and then sat up with a start. "Yes," he said, "yes, go on."

A typical, sleepy, seacoast village, thought Palsey as he startd his car and headed out toward the reef. And what a fine humorous vein of Americana he had uncovered after Waldemar's story had proved to be a bust, poor fellow. Well, a man with no head for liquor had no business in this game. He'd had a few drinks himself, and yet he didn't know when he'd felt better, clearer-headed, lighter on his feet. A bank of storm clouds, he noticed, was building up to the west. Coming to a mailbox marked *O. RITTER*, he turned in the drive.

A frail little man with a straggling fringe of gray hair opened the door a couple of inches. "Yes," he said.

Palsey smiled. "I've come here to make a nuisance of myself," he began. The door closed.

He knocked again. "Mr. Ritter," he called, "Matt sent me out to see you. He waited. "Mr. Ritter, there's $10 here you can have." The door opened.

"Come in," said Mr. Ritter.

"I can't make out what you're after," he remarked a few minutes later," but if it's facts, then you wasted your time at that saloon. Liars, the whole pack of them, liars and worse. That Harpy now —"

"He seemed to be a likeable old chap."

"Ha! Likeable isn't the word for him — he and that precious brother of his and their mother as bad as the two of them. Oh, some will tell you they never buttered the road, but nobody can tell me —"

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"Just a second there!" Palsey whipped out his notebook. "Buttered the road — I've never come across that expression any place else."

"Most places it wouldn't apply," Mr. Ritter said, "but here there's only the one road coming into town and that hill in front of Harpy's — you see it, it has the sharp turn at the bottom right on the edge of the water. Now, say a carload of rich folks comes into town — well, naturally they have to go back out the same way —"

"Mr. Ritter!" The stranger's eyes were bright with horror. "Surely you can't mean —"

"All right. Then what does Harpy use that diving suit for? Suppose you tell me that. And why do you think I always carry a bucket of sand when I drive out of town? Of course they aren' supposed to bother local people, but you never know. There was Miss Astrakan's father for one — the papers all gave out that he'd run off with a palmist from the state fair, but did anybody actually *see* him? No, they didn't — nobody that I talked to. However, Miss Astrakan is the person to consult about that." He got to his feet and began edging his visitor towards the door.

"This isn't a matter to be taken lightly," Palsey was saying. "Someone really ought to be notified."

"Yes. Just keep on out toward the point — the next house on the left."

Palsey got in his car and started the engine.

"If you're going to drive at night," Mr. Ritter called after him, "you ought to get a pair of headlights."

Palsey nodded, backed over a rosebush, and drove away. The sky was growing darker.

Such a peculiar town, Palsey was thinking — any amount of material but so disjointed — no real community tradition at all, not in the proper sense of the word. It was rather disturbing. He recognized Miss Astrakan's cottage and drew up in front of it.

A stout, elderly lady was standing in the front yard with a sprinkling can in her hand. She had on a flowered kimono and a blue plush hat. He remembered to smile as she turned toward him.

"I don't want to take too much of your time, Miss Astrakan —" He tripped over a garden hose concealed in the tall grass.

"Why not?" Her voice had a resonant, theatrical quality.

"We're all busy these days, I realize that, but I did want to ask a couple of questions about your father." He wondered if that might sound a little personal; he didn't want to offend her. "Nothing too personal, you understand, nothing offensive." He smiled again.

"I see," she studied him for a moment. "Maybe we'd better go inside." He followed her into the house, into the dark and steamy parlor. It was filled with potted plants, most of them running to weeds, but still a fine luxuriant growth which gave the room a heady odor, something like marsh gas. Miss Astrakan sank

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into a rocking chair, setting the sprinkling can beside her. "You say you wanted to see Papa?" she asked suddenly.

"See him?" He sat down, looking at her in some confusion. "No, I don't believe I said that. In fact, Mr. Ritter gave me to understand —"

"Mr. Ritter? Yes, I know who you mean. I believe he does go by that name now. Well, well, you'll have a nice little glass of port, won't you?" She located a pair of cloudy tumblers and filled them from a china teapot. "By rights I ought to use a decanter, I suppose, but it spills so. Now then —" she took an enthusiastic swallow — "that's more like it."

Palsey bent his head down to hide a smile. The wine had left her with a wide purple mustache. Ordinarily it was more of a salt and pepper shade. He sipped his drink carefully — it was quite warm and appeared to be heavily fortified. "This is very good of you," he murmured.

"I'm so sorry Papa isn't here," she went on. "The two of you would have gotten on famously. Papa didn't get along with just anybody, but he would have thought the world of you. My heart tells me." She placed one hand over her bosom — the hand with the glass in it.

He nodded politely. "Let's see now," he began, drawing himself up in a businesslike way. "Do I understand that Mr. Astrakan has not been living here for some time?"

"He wasn't at all like other men. He was a prince." Over the rim of her glass she looked at him fondly with brimming eyes. "Of course he retired years ago, but you're so much like him — your carriage, your little mannerisms — you'll have to excuse me." She wiped her eyes with the hem of her kimono. "He was in the shipping trade, you know. Druggists' supplies and some passengers — Chinese, most of them seemed to be, but then he was always fond of the Orient. There used to be a lovely pair of chopsticks somewhere around if I could only think where they were. I want you to have them."

"You're very kind," he said. "Now let me see if I have this straight. After his retirement, Mr. Astrakan —"

"He would have worshipped the ground you walked on." She lurched toward his chair with the teapot in her hand.

"No more for me," he said, "really."

"You're so fine," she said, "really fine." She patted him heavily on the arm. The wine leaped from his glass and splashed on his trousers.

He brushed at the stain with sticky fingers. "No harm done, no harm at all."

She filled her own glass and returned to her rocker. "I'm just sick about the chopsticks. Papa would have wanted you to have them, I know. Well, there's only one thing to do. Go and see Caleb Voss and make him give you a pair. He was one of Papa's skippers and he has lots of them."

"Really it isn't necessary."

"It's no more than right," she

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said. "After all, he stole them from Papa. He used to steal something every voyage, and one time he killed a cabin boy. He was a fine skipper, so Papa always said, but just a little common, I'm afraid."

Palsey got to his feet uncertainly, "Maybe I'd better be going."

"I suppose you know best," she said. "Bless your heart." She followed him to the front door and watched as he went down the garden path, tripping over the hose once more.

He opened the car door. "Miss Astrakan," he called, "somebody's taken my seat covers."

She smiled and waved. "Just tell Caleb I sent you. It's the last house on the point."

He drove along in low gear for some distance. His tongue felt sticky with the sweet port and his vision was a little indefinite. It was getting rather dark — raining, in fact. He decided to put the seat covers on his expense account — they were of Harris tweed and hard to replace. He shifted into second. The thing to do was see this Captain Voss and then give his head a chance to clear before he started back to the city.

A minute later he was sitting on Caleb's side porch with a glass of rum in his hand."

"Now, port is all right for fat ladies and such as that," Caleb was saying, "but a skinny fellow like you, it'll go right to your head. You haven't got the bulk to take it up. But you take good rum like this here — why it tones up the whole system. Makes you feel fine."

It was true, too. He hadn't had more than half a glass and already his mind was alert and keen. His insight had improved, too, gotten more acute. Caleb, he could see, was a forthright and sincere person. He was beginning to wonder about some of the others. "You know," he remarked, "I don't believe you killed that cabin boy at all."

"That so?" Caleb had picked up a brassbound telescope and was scanning the rocks at the foot of the cliff below them.

"Yes. I'm beginning to think some of the people I talked to were trying to take advantage of me. Thought they saw a chance to make a little money, I suppose. Well, they'll soon know better. My company pays, and pays well, but our research staff authenticates every scrap that we buy. If Americana isn't authentic, it isn't anything." He drank the last of his rum. "What are you looking at?"

"It's the clams." Caleb put down the telescope and picked up his drink. "They're restless tonight — I don't like the look of it."

"Clams?" An incredulous note had come into Palsey's voice. "Now really, Captain —"

Caleb picked up an ax handle which was leaning against the door, and took a couple of vicious swings with it, one to the right, one to the left. He put it on the floor next to his chair and sat down. "Son," he said, "your best bet is to go back to the city. That's the

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place to do your authenticating — where you know your way around."

"Now, hold on a minute, Captain," Palsey broke in. "I certainly didn't mean to offend you in any way. But you can't expect our research staff —"

"I wouldn't know about them." Caleb reached down stiffly to pull up his trouser leg. There was a wicked-looking scar running along his shin. "That's the way I authenticated them clams — only took fourteen stitches, but it satisfied me."

Palsey was staring at him, suspicious but uncertain. "I don't understand," he said. "I'm afraid I don't get it."

Caleb frowned. "Of course you got to realize there's different breeds of clams — cockles, horse-neck, rock clams — everybody's heard of them." Palsey nodded. "But there's one kind hardly anybody's heard of — not and lived to tell it. That's the tiger clam." Palsey shook his head. "There may be years go by that you won't see a one, and nobody can say where they've went. And then all of a sudden they'll come in over the reef — hundreds and thousands of them. Like they done last week." Palsey leaned forward in his chair. "Let me freshen your drink. Well, sir, they're about the size of a soup plate, with a kind of wavy shell, and they lay there in the rocks and eat crabs and eels and whatever comes along. Harmless and useless is what they mostly are, except for one thing —and that's if they get a taste of human blood."

Palsey stepped across the porch and looked over the railing, swaying unsteadily in the rain. "You mean to say they're down there now?"

"Of course, up here on the bluff there's nothing to worry about," Caleb went on, "but the houses down along the beach —" He reached out and drew the ax handle a little closer to his chair.

Palsey turned toward him, a feverish light in his eye. "Captain, I want to go down and see them."

Caleb sighed and got slowly to his feet. "I was afraid you were going to say that — could tell by the cut of your jib. Well, I guess I can't back out now." He picked up the ax handle and handed Palsey the lantern. "You take the light and go first," he said. At Palsey's car they stopped. "Damnation, son!" said Caleb, "how'd you get it up here without any wheels?"

Palsey moved the lantern to get a better look. "It had wheels when I got here," he said.

"They don't make cars like they used to," Caleb said. "That's the path over there."

Palsey started down the sharp incline, sliding and stumbling. "It's pretty exciting, isn't it?" he laughed wildly. "This is going to be a new experience for me."

"Yes," the Captain said.

The rain beat down harder. It was now completely dark.

There were maybe half a dozen customers in Doc Hemphill's store when Deputy Sheriff Mouser came in. He went over to the counter where Doc was putting up an order. "You know

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anything about a man named Clarence Waldemar?"

Doc shook his head.

"Or a fellow named Gene Palsey?" the Sheriff continued, watching Doc closely.

"Palsey?" Doc took a corncob pipe from his pocket and fired it up. "Sure. Used to come into the store here a few years back — then him and the wife and kids left town —"

"Just a second there. This Palsey didn't have a wife. He was a young fellow, tall, blond hair —"

"No, I wouldn't call him young — I'd say 50 anyhow. Had a nose that was pushed over to one side, always voted a straight Republican ticket —"

"All right, you people," Sheriff Mouser turned to address the room. "I'm looking for a couple of missing men. One of them by the name of Palsey left Abalone Junction two days ago driving a yellow car and hasn't been heard of since. Now just down the street here there's two yellow fenders on a vacant lot. I've been asking a few questions around town, and I've been getting some mighty funny answers."

None of the customers had any comment to make. It wasn't even certain any of them had been listening. Captain Voss, for one, seemed concerned only with the shotgun he was examining. He jerked it up to his shoulder a couple of times, testing it for balance. Then he swung it around in an arc — as if tracking an imaginary duck. Each time it came a little closer to the Sheriff.

"There's something funny going on here," the Sheriff said. He moved around behind the end of the counter.

The door opened and Harpy wandered in. He gazed about him vacantly, nodded once or twice, and sat down on a sack of feed. "Doc," he said, "who is it owns that car outside with the red spotlight and the flat tire?"

The Sheriff whirled and stepped to the window. When he turned around his face was a dull crimson. "What do you know about that tire?" he yelled.

Harpy blinked his eyes. "Bought with taxpayers' money," he said, "I know that much. If you can't take care of your car —"

"I can take care of it!" The Sheriff managed to get his voice under control. "And maybe a few other things, too."

"That's what you're paid for," said Doc. "Harpy, your ma just phoned in. She's baking a pie and wants you to bring out some lard." Harpy nodded and yawned. "She wants it right away," Doc said.

Harpy picked up two of the twenty-pound pails and staggered out the door. The Sheriff looked at Doc suspiciously, "Listen," he said, "who do you think you're fooling? Nobody's phoned in here lately, and what would they want with 40 pounds of lard anyhow?"

Captain Voss came walking over, the shotgun in the crook of his arm. "You take that family of Harpy's," he said. "Crazy for pie. Apple, cherry, banana cream — it don't make any

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difference to them. That little dab of lard won't last through tomorrow."

"All right, make a joke out of it!" The Sheriff's lips were trembling. His hand dropped to the butt of his revolver. "Somebody's going to be mighty sorry before I'm through." He strode over and jerked open the door. "Just keep this in mind," he said, "there's something fishy around here and I'm going to get to the bottom of it!"

"Yes," the Captain said. "Yes, indeedy!"

"O"

RIEN NE VA PLUS

by Alexander Woollcott

(*Continued from page 52*)

in quest of the body. But there was none. Not at the indicated spot, nor anywhere else on the shore. After further search, the minor chieftain from the Casino, who had himself tucked 10,000 francs into the pocket of the now missing suicide and was still lurking, much puzzled, in the middle-distance, returned at last to the *Salles Privées*, only to find them humming with a new chapter. It seems that that young American with the white forelock — the one somebody or other had inaccurately reported as killed — had reappeared, apparently restored in spirits, and certainly restored in funds. He had bet tremendously, lingered for only three turns of the wheel, and departed with 100,000 francs. The attendants assumed he had merely been out to dinner. At least, the careless fellow had spilled some tomato sauce on his shirt front.

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THE QUIGLEY LIBRARIAN

by ROBERT LEWIS

THE LIBRARY SAT BACK FROM THE street, behind a patch of grass and a fringe of shrubs. It was a small white frame building, like so many public buildings in New England towns. Over its door it bore a sign, *Quigley Township. The Library.* Beside the door a smaller sign announced proudly, *Air Conditioned.*

When I entered, I found myself in a sort of corridor formed by two low shelves of books, which divided the one room into two alcoves. The labels, *Fiction* on the left and *Non-fiction* on the right, explained the purpose of the division. At the end of the corridor, facing the street door, was a desk, behind which the librarian sat. She was a middle-aged spinster with a bun of mousy hair and pince-nez glasses.

"Good afternoon," I said. "Do you mind if I look around?"

"Good afternoon," she replied. "Goodness, no, that's what we're *for*." Her glance enveloped me with an air of intellectual conspiracy. *I approve of you,* it said; *you read books.* The non-fiction department was empty, and I entered it. In the center of the room was a large metal box, grilled on top, which sent cool air into the room. I stood in front of it, letting the air play over my face. Then, feeling the librarian's eyes on me, I wandered over to the shelves and took down a book at random, leafed through it idly, and put it back.

The librarian was at my side, eager to be of assistance. "Was there anything particular you wanted?" she inquired.

"Do you have anything on shellfish?" I asked.

Her face fell. "I don't think so," she said. "But I'll see." She consulted the catalogue, then announced, sadly, "No."

"It's really not important," I said, to lessen her disappointment. "I really came in here to get cool. That's a wonderful idea someone had, to air condition the library. These hot days I can't imagine a finer place to while away a few hours."

Her air of pride indicated whose idea it had been. But she said only, "I like to have things *right*," and left me to my own devices.

There was a drowsy quality about the Quigley library that made you expect to find graybeards nodding in the corners. But aside from the librarian and myself, only two children were there. In the fiction department a small boy sat at one of the tables, his eyes glued to a book. A girl of about twelve wandered along the shelves. Finally she found a book that suited her, and gave it to the librarian with a card. When she had left, I went to the desk and asked the

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librarian how one went about taking out books.

"Do you have a card?" she inquired, knowing very well, small as Quigley is, that I did not.

"I'm afraid not," I said. "I'm new in town. Is a card necessary?"

"Well, we have our *rules*, you know. We can make out a temporary card for you, if you like."

"All right," I said. "Only I'm afraid I'm putting you to a lot of trouble."

"Oh, not at *all*. And, anyhow, I'm glad to have someone in the library with me." I glanced at the boy sitting at the table. "Oh, Tommy?" she said. "He's not much help, is he?"

"Help?" I said, puzzled. "I don't understand."

She said archly, "You *are* new in town, aren't you? I thought everybody knew about it. I'm Miss Cassidy." She gave me a sidelong glance. "Goodness," she added, when my face maintained its look of interested politeness, "I can see that you don't read the papers. Haven't you ever heard of 'Legs' Malone, the New York gangster? I'm the one who sent him to jail."

"Wait a minute," I said. "I *did* read something about that. Didn't he run over a child in his automobile, or something like that?"

She was beaming now. "It happened right here in Quigley," she said proudly. "Right in front of the library, when I was going to lunch. The Simmons child was bouncing a ball in the street. A big black limousine with a New York license came racing along and ran him over. The driver slowed down and looked back, and then drove away fast. I had just enough time to get a look at the driver and the license number before the car disappeared."

"What happened then?" I asked.

"He was convicted of manslaughter. When the case came to trial, I identified the driver, who was 'Legs' himself, and he was sent to jail."

I shook my head admiringly. "You have courage. Didn't they try to intimidate you?"

"Of course they tried," she said, pink and pleased. "But they didn't know *me!* You can see why I don't like to be alone in the library. There's no telling what *they* might do."

"But surely you have police protection."

"Oh goodness, yes! That is, I *did* have police protection. The Sneckells boy used to escort me to and from the library every day. And he carried a gun too! But it's been a year, and nothing has happened, and so I asked them to stop it. That 'Legs' Malone must be a wicked man. When the judge passed sentence on him, he gave me such a look! I was quite frightened."

"Sheer bravado," I said. "He's safe in prison and you have nothing to worry about."

The little boy approached the desk with a book in his hand. "Hello, Tommy," I said. "Reading about Indians?"

"Hi," he said. "How did you know?"

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I explained that I was a magician. He surveyed me suspiciously, then said, "Ah-h!" in a tone of disbelief. He received his stamped book from Miss Cassidy and went out.

"Now about your temporary card," Miss Cassidy said, poising her pen over a lined card.

I gave her a name, adding, "My, isn't it peaceful with nobody here?"

"It's very pleasant. And your address?"

"New York," I said. She raised her eyes swiftly, fixing them on my face. "Yes, Miss Cassidy," I said regretfully, "your suspicion is well-founded. A certain 'wicked man' asked me to pay you his respects. It would have been so much more pleasant for you if you had allowed yourself to be persuaded by reason at the trial."

Miss Cassidy opened her mouth and emitted a chirp like a bird. With my left hand I reached out and took the card from the desk, and with my right I removed my pistol from my shoulder holster. Miss Cassidy did not move, but her eyes widened and she chirped again. Just then a hard object pressed against my back and a voice said, "Stick 'em up!"

I should have known, of course, but for one unforgivable moment I was taken by that panic that always follows when a man's carefully laid plans are blown sky-high. I had dropped the pistol before I realized that the command had been uttered in a boyish treble. I turned around, and there was Tommy, a toy pistol in his hand, his eyes shining and his lips quivering with his own courage. And when I grabbed for my own pistol, it was too late; Miss Cassidy had it.

There was nothing to do. I turned and ran, sweeping Tommy to one side with the back of my hand. Outside, I raced for my car which I had parked out of sight around the corner. I got away without any difficulty, except that I almost tripped over a bicycle leaning against a tree in front of the library. It was probably Tommy's bicycle, because fastened to the center of the handlebar was a shiny tin badge with the insignia, *Dick Tracy Crime-Stopper.*

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Lillian de la Torre, creator of that grand old gentleman-and-scholar, Dr. Sam: Johnson, realized that most of us would not be able to attend the Coronation of Great Britain's new Queen. So she has given us, after patient and painstaking research, the tale of an earlier Coronation, "as if from a manuscript found among the papers of James Boswell" — the Coronation of His Majesty King George III in Westminster Abbey on Tuesday, September 22, 1761. And, dear reader, you will be transported to the very scene! You will be sitting in a ten-guinea seat in the Abbey and witness all the pomp and ceremony of that great event. If, perhaps, you find the details overfull, pray be thankful — for each and every detail has a marvelous fascination, and the whole makes gorgeous reading. For there is more in the affair than the Coronation story. Before you are finished, you will have taken part in a regal chase — or perhaps we should have said, a princely pursuit — with a Prince who has a price of £30,000 on his head the pursued, and a Bow Street Runner and his underlings the pursuers.

Surely there is no living writer who, within the framework of a tale of criminous adventure, could invest an Eighteenth Century Coronation with more compelling flavor and authenticity than EQMM's own Lillian de la Torre, God bless her . . .

CORONATION STORY

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

(as narrated by James Boswell)

HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE III WAS crowned in Westminster Abbey on Tuesday, September 22, 1761. Great excitement attended the affair, and great preparations went before. I for my part, ever desirous of seeing great events, resolved to take French leave from Edinburgh long enough to play a part; and indeed I was destined to play a stranger part than I supposed.

I found London agog. Scaffolds were building all along the line of march. Light horse were told off to patrol the streets. Foot guards to the number of 2800 were assigned posts about the Court. In Bow Street the magistrates issued orders for keeping the peace by day and by night. In Westminster Hall the Lord High Steward perfected a mannerly horse in the art of backing out of the Royal presence. At St. James's the young King wedded and bedded his new Queen.

The morning of September 22

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dawned bright and fair. I was stirring betimes. By the kindness of Lord Eglinton, whose indulgence to a truant Scotch lad of twenty can never be forgotten, I was accommodated with a ten-guinea place in the Abbey. I lost no time in taking my place. Mankind is the book I study; I beguiled a tedious interval by observing my fellow-subjects about me.

They were of every degree. In the best box by the altar sat the King's young brothers in white and silver. In the ambassadors' gallery the Mahometan envoys flaunted caftans of flowered silk and turbans of fine muslin, with dagger and poignard scabbarded in crimson. About me fat cits sucked oranges, beaux preened and ogled, pretty misses blushed under the stare of a quizzing-glass. Behind me a burly man with a cast in one eye snorted through a mashed nose — a Bow Street runner, if I read him aright.

Most of all my interest was engaged by a heavy-set man in middle life, who sat in the next place but one. Over the intervening vacancy I studied him. His mulberry attire was soberly decent, his little brown scratch-wig ill-fitting, his strong face scarred with the King's evil; but his deep-cut features had the powerful and elegant look of an ancient statue. I wished much to hear his voice.

'Twas a voice of sonorous and manly beauty, though the words when they came were no great matter.

"Beau!" he called resoundingly. "This way, sir!"

The man addressed was a stately figure, clad in black and silver cut in the French fashion. The tail of his elegant powdered wig was encased in a large black silk bag. So much I could see as he stood and contemplated the nave of the Abbey. Then he turned at the voice, and approached.

"Did you address me, sir?"

The man in mulberry started, and peered into the other's face. I peered too. 'Twas a beautiful and commanding face, a long oval, features regular and strong, heavy-lidded eyes compelling to command or woo. 'Twas a face I had seen — but where?

The man in mulberry peered, and shook his head.

"I cry your pardon, sir, I have mistook. I took you for my friend young Beauclerk."

"Son to the Duke of St. Albans?"

"He."

"Then small wonder," said the stranger with a slight smile, "for he is my cousin, and they say he favours my grandfather — as do I."

I cared little for these genealogical revelations, but the man in mulberry raised his rugged brows and peered more closely still. What he saw seemed to strike him strongly, for he rose to his feet with elaborate old-fashioned courtesy.

"You, sir," said he, "are the last man I would have looked to meet with on this occasion —"

"O ho," says the stranger, "so I am known?"

"I was at Derby," says the man in mulberry.

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"Then answer me this — who comes hither with better right?"

"No man!" asseverated the man in mulberry.

Outside, to a roar from the populace, the trumpets were heard to sound.

"The ceremony is about to begin," said the man in mulberry. "Pray take this empty place; your cousin will not grudge it you."

There was a blare of trumpets and a ruffle of drums as the great doors were flung wide and in a gold powder of sunshine the Coronation procession entered the Abbey.

First came the King's herb-woman, with her six maids, strewing the way with fragrant flowering simples. Functionaries in scarlet followed, staves in hand. Then came the King's musick to make the arches ring — a fife, drums, sixteen trumpets. What notabilities followed, 'twere wearisome to tell, what robes of crimson and gold; bishops in laced rochets, heralds and pursuivants in parti-coloured tabards, peers and peeresses in crimson velvet edged with miniver pure or powdered (which is to say ermine white or spotted), each according to degree.

Then came the new young Queen, slim and pale, weighted with her velvet robe; her crown, her sceptre, and her gold and ivory dove borne before her.

To trumpet and drum now paced into the Abbey the great of the Kingdom — the Royal Dukes, the Earl Marshal, the Lord High Steward, the High Constable of England, the High Constable of Scotland —

At this last I stared. Of gigantick mould, perfectly formed, the High Constable of Scotland was by all odds the handsomest of George's henchmen; but what had he to do here? His father, the unfortunate Earl of Kilmarnock, had joined Bonnie Prince Charlie when he raised the Stuart banner in the '45. After the Stuart cause was lost at Culloden, George's Kingly grandfather had taken off Kilmarnock's head and set it above Temple Bar. Now here was Kilmarnock's son, coronetted as Earl of Erroll, to see young George crowned; while Kilmarnock's head still shrivelled over Temple Bar, a black and shapeless lump, and Prince Charlie's head, with a great price on it, was hid in exile who knows where?

But I had no time to muse on the downfall of the House of Stuart, for now, preceded by crown, orb, and sceptre, to the triumph of the trumpets, there entered the Abbey — George, by the Grace of God (and the defeat of the Young Pretender) King of Great Britain, & c., & c., &c. In his Parliament robes of crimson velvet, on his head a cap of estate adorned with jewels and turned up with ermine, he walked under a canopy of cloth of gold borne over him by sixteen barons of the Cinque Ports, and six young noblemen carried his crimson train.

"Sirs," cried the Archbishop of Canterbury, "I here present to you King George, the rightful inheritor of the crown of this realm; wherefore all you that are come this day to do

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your homage, service, and bounden duty, are ye willing to do the same?"

Upon this there was a great shout: "God save King George!" and the drums beat and the trumpets sounded.

At my side the man in black and silver wrenched his body inly like a man stabbed to the quick; I heard his teeth grind in his head.

"Alack, friend, are you in pain?" I asked him under cover of the tumult.

On a long breath he composed himself.

" 'Tis but the twinge of an old wound," he replied with a rueful smile. "I had thought the place healed, or no curiosity would have drawn me into this unfriendly air, where the wind blows ever counter. I will command myself hereafter."

"I entreat you may do so," said his neighbour in mulberry quietly, "for there's one behind takes too much interest, I fear, in your person."

I glanced over my shoulder at the man with the mashed nose. One eye was certainly fixed with a gleam in our direction.

The man in black and silver bent his gaze henceforth steadily and quietly upon the young King. George III was then in his twenty-third year. His fresh-coloured face was regular and strong. The full eyes had the heavy lids of his Stuart forebears, but the sulky lip hailed from Hanover, and his stiff proud bearing had been learned in the land of his birth, which was England.

The stranger beside me watched intently as the ceremony proceeded, almost like one who learns a role. He listened attentively to the Coronation sermon, preached by the Bishop of Salisbury from the text, I, Kings, x, 9: "Blessed be the Lord thy God which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee King to do judgement and justice."

His lips seemed to move as the King, at the high altar, upon the great Bible, pronounced the Coronation oath: "The things, which I have herebefore promised, I will perform and keep. So help me God and the contents of this book."

Now, seated in King Edward's chair before the altar, under a canopy of cloth of gold, the King was anointed on hands, breast, shoulders, elbows, and head, and invested in priestly garments of gold. The gilded spurs were touched to his heels, the sword of state girt about him, the armill bound to his arms, and on his shoulders was set the imperial pall of cloth of gold and purple brocade, lined with red taffeta. He received into his hands the emblems of kingship, the jewelled orb, the sceptres of the cross and of the dove, and the sword of state, thenceforward borne naked before him. Finally, the Archbishop set upon his head the Crown of King Edward. Upon this the trumpets sounded a point of war, the drums beat the charge, and all the people shouted. From the church battlements a musquet was fired for a signal, and the cannon boomed.

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Being now crowned, the young King was forthwith enthroned in the midst of the church, and the Lords Spiritual and Temporal came to the foot of the throne to do him homage in the form following:

"I, William Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire, do become your liege man of life and limb, and of earthly worship: and faith and truth I will bear unto you to live and die against all manner of folks. So help me God."

Then each Peer touched his crown in token of fealty, and kissed his left cheek.

All the while these rites were doing, the Treasurer of the Household, attended by the Garter King of Arms and the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, flung Coronation medals to the crowd, nor did he cease till the Queen in her turn had been crowned. Much as I wished I might catch a medal, the only one that came my way came into two other hands at once, those of the swivel-eyed man and the courtly stranger. The stranger held on as of right; but the burly fellow tugging amain, he turned in some surprise, loosed his hold, and said courteously:

"Pray, fellow, have this for your own, for 'tis clear you will prize it more than I."

"Very like," said the cock-eyed man hoarsely, giving the other a stare of peculiar insolence and meaning.

Now, the Queen having been crowned and certain religious rites observed, the King departed into St. Edward's Chapel, with the swords borne before him, his crown on his head, and his sceptres in his hands, to robe anew for the great Coronation feast to follow.

Being robed, to the sound of tucket and drum, he departed in procession as he had come, and all along the way the multitudes shouted to greet him. Suddenly the high shouts of greeting changed to a long breath of dismay. In the moment of his triumph, the great diamond set in his state crown had fallen out and rolled underfoot. Though it was at once recovered, there wanted not those who presaged therefrom some great loss to the Kingdom before his reign was ended; and so it turned out, for in 1783 the American colonies, brightest jewel of Britain's Empire, were ours no more. But this is to anticipate.

The man in mulberry stuck close to the handsome stranger as we debouched into Old Palace Yard, and I to him, and the swivel-eyed man to us all. The last rays of the declining sun made rosy the stately halls and spires, and fell upon the high-coloured face of a lounging young man of fashion, exquisite in cloth-of-silver. 'Twas young Topham Beauclerk, known to me through Lord Eglinton's fashionable circle. The man in mulberry saluted him, and had a lazy smile in return.

"Egad, sir," drawled the pretty youth, "I hope you had the good of our ten-guinea seats, for as Heaven's my home I came too late, and was fain to make shift among the rabble."

"You are well served, lazy dog —"

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"Behold!" cried the impudent young idler, "Satan rebuking sin!"

"But your ten-guinea seat has served this gentleman well —"

"Then I'm content," said young Beauclerk. "What, Jemmy, 'tis you? You are welcome to London."

"No, sir," said I, " 'twas this gentleman here, that claims to be kin to you."

The man in mulberry, too late, gave me a warning scowl.

"Say you so?" said Beauclerk idly. "O' which side of the blanket?"

The sharp edge of the jest was for himself, for all the world knew that he got his royal Stuart blood by the left hand, being the great-grandson of King Charles II by pretty Nell Gwynne the orange wench; but the stranger took it ill.

"On the right side," he said with icy hauteur.

"The Devil you say!" said Beauclerk with a sudden sharp glance. "Who are you then, my *legitimate* cousin?"

"A stranger," struck in the man in mulberry quickly, "who is here today and gone tomorrow, and one whom you would be loath to harm; so let us make him welcome. Will you not join us, sir, to see the King dine in Westminster Hall?"

"I thank you, sir," said the stately stranger in black and silver. "I am for Westminster Hall; but I have a thing to do there, of which I advise you to stand clear; I thank you for your courtesy, and so farewell."

So saying, he moved off quickly through the crowd. But the man in mulberry, for all his bulk, was as quick; and so we came to Westminster Hall all in a knot, and all in a knot we passed within. I heard the swivel-eyed man snorting behind me.

We were just in time to behold the ceremonies of the feast. The King and Queen, refreshed by a few moments of repose in the Court of Wards, were just taking their places on the dais. As the Queen entered, the entire hall at once, as it were, burst into flame. By an ingenious train of prepared flax, fire was carried to all the candles in an instant, and the blazing flax rained in flakes of fire all over the hall. But no mischief ensued, and directly the first course was heralded by trumpets and ushered in by the Lord High Steward, the High Constable, and the Earl Marshal, in their robes and coronets, mounted upon managed horses. The Lord High Steward, Lord Talbot, yielded little to young Erroll in size and handsome looks; but he commanded little love, being a brute and a bully, proud and ignorant, and the commonalty rejoiced with raucous laughter and coarse gibes to see him put down at the very start of the feast.

'Twas in consequence of his having trained his horse too well in the duty of backing from the Royal presence. The obstinate brute persisted in backing *into* the Royal presence as well, and the swarming lackeys and understrappers had much ado to turn the creature right-end-to and get him started headfirst in the way he should

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go; Talbot cursing hideously the while. At last, however, the great golden platters and tureens were borne in after the curveting and prancing chargers, and the first course was served up.

I own I could have endured a mouthful of the turtle soup myself, having eaten naught since dawn but a meagre dry bun; but I swallowed air, and dined with Duke Humphrey.

Before the second course, the trumpets again sounded, and again a procession entered the hall headed by mounted men. Again the Marshal and the Constable rode in their robes. Between them rode a figure of romance, a knight in full armor, armed cap-à-pie. He was a goodly man, mounted upon a white charger and clothed in white armor, with great plumes upon his helmet of blue, red, and white. This was John Dymoke Esq: of Scrivelsby Manor, the King's hereditary champion. He was attended by serjeants, pages, and pursuivants; his banners were displayed before him. As he drew rein, a herald read in a loud voice his challenge:

"If any person, of what degree soever, high or low, shall deny or gainsay our Sovereign Lord King *GEORGE III*, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c., Grandson and next heir to our Sovereign Lord King George II the late King deceased, to be right heir to the imperial crown of this realm of Great Britain, or that he ought not to enjoy the same; here is his Champion, who saith, that he lieth, and is a false traitor, being ready in person to combat with him; and in this quarrel will adventure his life against him, on what day soever he shall be appointed."

Upon these words the champion with proud defiance dashed down the iron gauntlet which he held.

"I take up that gage!" cried a ringing voice, and forth stepped the stranger in black and silver. "On behalf of my father, the rightful King of this realm . . ."

At the Dukes' table a tall figure rose; the mounted Peers twisted in their saddles; the servitors looked around bemused; but Charles Edward Stuart had vanished from their ken, having been summarily seized by the resolute hands of the formidable gentleman in mulberry, and dragged quickly into the recess of a postern stair. Beauclerk and I were after him, and the carved wood door shut upon us.

"Are you mad, your Royal Highness?" uttered his captor in his ear. "Do you wish to carry into your grave the last hope of the House of Stuart?"

"As soon go into my grave now while defending the rights of my House," said the Prince, "as die ignobly in a mean street twenty years hence."

"You'll not die now if I can prevent," said the man in mulberry, hustling him down the stair, "so I beg you'll be counselled by me. This passage leads by the crypt of St. Stephen's into Old Palace Yard, whence we'll make off —"

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"With soldiers in their thousands ringing Westminster about?" cried I.

"There's no help for it," said the man in mulberry. "We'll not try to break through the ring of soldiery. We'll saunter in the press till we come to Parliament Stairs, and there by force or fraud we'll take a boat and so get on the river. There we may concert further measures."

"I thank you for your good will," said the Prince, "and beg that you will return to the Hall, for I would not involve you in my fate."

"Tush, my royal cousin," said young Beauclerk. " 'Tis the best of sport, the coursing of the royal stag —"

"Aye, if you hunt with the hounds. 'Tis little sport for the stag."

"Yet I'll run with the stag."

"You were best begin. Hark!"

Distinctly we heard footsteps following us, echoing hollowly in the subterranean vault.

"Press on," said I, "I'll hold the passage."

"Not so, my young friend," said the Prince firmly. "You have your life before you; mine has reached a cul-de-sac. I'll face what comes for me."

He turned his face backwards toward the gloom. The footsteps hurried closer, and as we stood we perceived that it was young Erroll. His robe was over his arm, his coronet on his head. He rushed straight up to the Prince, and flung the robe about his shoulders.

"In this gear," said he hurriedly, "your Royal Highness may safely make your retreat."

He set the coronet upon the Prince's head. Dropping to his knee, he lifted the trailing robe, looped it over the Prince's arm, and kissed the hand he held.

"This for my father —" he murmured. "Farewell, my Prince; I must not stay."

As the Prince strode on in the gloom, crowned and robed, in peril of his life, the disinherited Stuart was the most regal sight I ever hope to see. I would have died for him; and perhaps, I reflected, I might yet be called upon to do so; for who knew what awaited at the head of the stair?

At the head of the stair was the door leading into Old Palace Yard. The man in mulberry put his ear to it. Outside was the murmur of the throng, but a murmur as of bees, not wasps. The hue and cry had not reached Old Palace Yard. The listener opened the door a crack, and quietly closed it again. A sentry in a red coat blocked the entrance.

"This is our moment," murmured the young man of fashion in my ear. "I am no scowrer, but I know how to hustle the watch if need be. Are you with me, Jemmy?"

I nodded. With a sudden burst we erupted from the door, knocking the sentry flat. Amid many a hiccough and vinous apology we impeded his rising with bungling assistance. Out of the corner of my eye I saw our regal Duke and his mulberry-clad

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follower striding without hurry toward Parliament Stairs. Beauclerk put gold into the sentry's hand, and we followed.

In New Palace Yard the hunt was up; we could hear the echo of the hue and cry. It surged along the law courts and spread into Old Palace Yard in a hurry of people. I caught a face in the forefront, mashed of nose, slewed of eye.

"This way, my Lord Duke," cried the man in mulberry loudly at the stair-head. "Your Grace's skiff is below."

A second red-coat stood on the landing.

"His Grace's skiff — " cried our guide peremptorily, scanning the boats clustered at the mooring. The soldier looked blank.

"That one — " selecting a new skiff with clean lines. "This way, your Grace."

The soldier respectfully assisted the fugitive into the boat. Then young Beauclerk embarked, I followed, and the man in mulberry shoved off. As we slid clear, there was a shout at the stair-head. The swivel-eyed man pelted down to the landing. He brought reinforcements in his wake, a couple of pandours as rugged as he. The fat was in the fire.

"Row!" shouted the man in mulberry.

We bent to the oars with a will. The skiff shot out into the dark Thames. On the landing there was a confusion of men shouting, and then a second skiff shot out into the river.

At first we had the start of them. Never shall I forget that flight down the dark reaches of the Thames. All was like a dream — the gentle swell of the waters, the light on the eddy as the oar rose, the sense of youth and strength as we made the boat leap like a live thing. Overhead the stars sparkled; the city was wreathed in festive light. With the wind at our backs we shot along swiftly between the lighted banks.

The Prince sat in the bow like a statue. The light off the shore sparkled on the gems in his diadem. The man in mulberry, at the tiller, was first to break the silence. "Whither do we steer?"

"Downriver. Do but bring me to the Admiral's Head below Greenwich, and I'll make my own way back to France."

"How will you so?"

"That, sir, is between me and certain honest smugglers of the right perswasion. Once aboard the hoy, and the Channel is as good as crossed ."

"Then," cried Beauclerk in high spirits, "Ho! for Greenwich!"

So we made our way down the Thames, mid tilt-boats and barges, to the whisper of the waves and the sound of instruments playing from pleasure craft about us. But all too soon we became aware by the creak of oars behind us that our brawny pursuers were creeping up on us.

"Hark," said I, "the Bow Street men are close."

"I marvel," said the Prince, "that they have not alarmed the whole river."

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"To share the blood-money with a riverful of people?" said our guide at the tiller.

"'Tis thirty thousand pounds," observed the Prince between amusement and a strange kind of pride. "There should be enough for all."

"These thief-takers are a greedy sort," replied our guide.

"So much the better," said the Prince, "for so I shall baulk them yet. But how is it that they have not fired upon us?"

"Coming from the Coronation," observed the man in mulberry, "they are no more armed than we. Yet this close pursuit is not well. I had hoped to land at the Old Swan; but if we cannot shake them off, we must shoot the bridge."

"Then," said the Prince equably, "let us shoot the bridge."

"Can you swim?"

"Must I?"

"Heaven forfend. But it is no light matter to shoot London bridge when a spring-tide is turning. So narrow are the arches, that water piles up on this side as high as five feet above the down-stream side, and then rushes through in whirlpools like a mill-race. The hardy boatmen shoot the bridge for sport; but many a boat has been overset, and many a life has been lost in the attempt."

"The alternative is capture?"

"I fear so, with these bloodhounds hot on our heels."

"No more, sir, we shoot the bridge," said Beauclerk resolutely.

"You, Beau, know our peril," said the man in mulberry. "But you, young man — can you swim?"

"I may soon know," said I, "for I am determined at all hazards to save his Royal Highness."

"Well spoken!" said our guide. "Hark!"

Ahead sounded the rush and gurgle of mighty waters.

"We are nearing the bridge. Attend me, for life may depend upon it. At my word, ship your oars, and cling fast to the thwart on either side. If we are overset, do not attempt to swim, for it is idle. Strive to maintain a hold upon the boat. Supported thus, I will endeavour to bring the boat and all of you to land."

The boat was now beginning to bob like a cork on the dark swells. The Prince quietly set aside the trammeling robe and coronet.

"Pull!" cried the man in mulberry, throwing his weight on the tiller. "Again!"

We gave one final desperate heave as a black shape loomed into the sky before us.

"Ship your oars!"

I remember pulling the long oar in; I remember clinging to the thwart; and then memory is a phantasmagoria of agitated descent, of spume and the smell of wet stone, of angry forces hurling the boat around like a leaf in an eddy as a dark shadow passed over; and then we were sliding and whirling into quiet water once again.

"Can yonder Bow Street bravo swim, think you?" asked the Prince.

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We turned our heads back to the bridge, and saw the pursuing boat shoot out between the arches and descend the whirling fall as we had done, lurching as crazily, and righting itself as safely. Our pursuers were cooler-headed; very likely they had done it before; for no sooner were they clear than they bent to their oars, and the distance between us started to close. We swept the oars in our turn.

By now the romance was gone out of our adventure, and only dogged, gruelling labour remained. My blistered palms were raw, my back was afire, and still the Bow Street boat hung on our quarter, and still we must row for dear life. As we passed the Tower of London, sinister and black for all its Coronation illuminations, I shuddered to think of those who had passed in by the Traitor's Gate and left their heads on Tower Green. I shuddered again to think that there could be no Tower Green for me, a commoner, but the gallows on Kennington Common, to be hanged, drawn, and quartered there.

If I was no oarsman, neither was the London dandy, nor yet the Prince of the Blood in his turn. For all our stout hearts and high spirits, the Bow Street boat began to gain. As we passed Greenwich Hospital, the lights of their illuminations, flooding the water, cast a glare on the Bow Street men; I liked little the lowering stare of the swivel eye, nor yet the hang-gallows countenances behind him.

"The hoy lies below the point yonder," said the Prince, "if I can but board her before they overhaul us."

"Board her in full sight, and have the King's ships take you in the Channel? No, sir, here is no remedy. We must first shake off our pursuers. Can you trust the people of the inn?"

"Implicitly."

"Then let us make for the inn."

Rowing hard, we rounded the point. There lay the hoy, rocking gently on the river swell. She was sloop-rigged, and looked swift. To our right, at the head of a narrow inlet, a light blinked: the inn.

The man in mulberry wrenched the tiller sharply; we bent to the oars; and the skiff shot suddenly into the inlet. Coming on fast, unprepared for our manoeuvre, the Bow Street boat shot past and on down the river.

"They will return," said our steersman. "Let us make good use of the time we have."

We hid our skiff among high grasses at the water's marge, and mounted the water-stair to the inn. We were no longer so point-device in what was left of our Coronation finery. I had torn a sleeve loose; Beauclerk's shining tissue was streaked with sweat; the Prince's black-and-silver was tarnished with spume. The landlady, poking the fire, screeched at the sight of us. She was a strapping comfortable soul in a vast gown like a feather-bed.

"No words, ma'am," says our guide, barring the door, "for the revenue men are at our heels. Pray conduct us to a backward room." I started for-

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ward. "Not you, my young friend. Your part is to hold Bow Street in parley as long as may be."

"In this attire?" I cried in dismay.

The landlady pitched me an old dun smock from a press. Below, a boat grated on shingle, and my companions vanished precipitately.

I was out of my coat and into the smock by the time a knock sounded. I let the knocker ply as long as I dared, while I wrenched off my silver buckles and stood my hair on end. When the door began to shake, I drew the bolt, grumbling and yawning.

Swivel-Eye stood there. His understrappers were not to be seen. My heart sank. What mischief were they about?

"Must I wait all night, ye curst crusted tortoise?" grumbled he. "Where's the young Pretender?"

"Who?"

"Never mind, booby, I'll find him if I have to search every cranny."

"Search, is it, ye ranty knave!" cried the virago landlady, descending candle in hand. "Search for what?"

"For a fugitive sheltering here, a tall rogue in black and silver."

"There's no one sheltering here, ye loud lubber, but me poor niece Betty, that's nigh her hour with child, poor soul. I've but just got her to sleep, God be good to her, and if you wake her I'll let you know it, so I will!"

"Be curst to your niece, stand aside!"

The burly thief-taker snatched the candle from her hand and pushed up the stair. The landlady scolded after, and I at her heels with my heart stopping my mouth. The first room was empty. In the second a shadowy form was bulging the bed-clothes.

"My niece," said the landlady. "Pray don't alarm her."

"I'll kiss her," leered the cock-eyed man, "*if* she be your niece indeed."

He flung back the bed-clothes and advanced the candle. Upon this rude awakening there came an unholy screech and a great box of the ear that rocked the swivel eye in the runner's head, before the niece — revealed as a niece indeed — went off into a fit of the hystericks.

The Bow Street man withdrew in confusion, snorting.

The next room was locked. Swivel-Eye bellowed like a bull for the key. Reluctantly the landlady left her niece to the hartshorn bottle, fetched the key, and turned it squeaking in the lock. There was nobody in the bed, and nobody under it; but when the searcher opened the press, he dragged forth by his black and silver collar a tall and handsome form in a Frenchified powdered wig.

"I arrest ye in the King's name!"

"Unhand me, scoundrel," said his captive with regal disdain.

"Not likely, ye slippery son of perdition!"

His victim measured him from under heavy lids, and struck suddenly. The blow went straight to the point of the jaw, and the burly thief-taker staggered back, dropping his candle. His attacker plunged for the window; my heart sank as his foot caught the

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bed-curtain and he fell headlong. The thief-taker was on him in an instant. As I picked up a chair, a figure in mulberry, hitherto lurking in the press, launched into the fray, and the three rolled intertwined on the floor.

"To me! To me!" bellowed the Bow Street man. "A rescue! A rescue!"

Feet pounded on stairs. Leaving their posts the Bow Street men moved on me in the passage. In vain did I try to hold the door. They ran over me like a team of horses.

As I recovered my chair, to my amazement the man in mulberry, breathing hard, with a blackened eye and his wig gone, slunk out and turned the key in the lock. He clapped a hand to my mouth and hustled me down the stair and out of the inn.

On the landing-stage a wigless man in a coat of stained silver tissue was drawing the skiff from the reeds. The starlight fell on the full eyes, now sparkling somewhat ruefully at the distant noise of combat from the inn. In silence he embraced us, and in silence he pushed off. From the inn sounded blows and curses; then a great crash; then silence. Still we stood watching the solitary rower till he reached the hoy. Not till the sail took the freshening breeze, and the vessel stood for France, did we walk back up the water-stairs to the inn.

We found the Bow Street runners, though battered and bloody, celebrating their triumph with a dram. Their victim, roped hand and foot, was propped on the settle. His wig was gone, his nose was bleeding, an eye was closed; he had a cut lip and a cracked crown; but he grinned upon us cheerfully as we entered the inn.

"Why, Mr. Beauclerk," says my companion, "what's amiss?"

"Everything's amiss," says Beauclerk. "These noddies take me for the Young Pretender."

'Twas morning before all was set straight. The Duke's son, let loose by the bemuddled thief-takers, had gone off laughing to the barber's, and my new friend and I sat at breakfast.

"Sir," said I, "we have done prodigies this Coronation Day. We have seen a King crowned; we have saved a King's life at risk of our own. *Haec olim meminisse iuvabit;* this will be pleasing to remember in days to come. Sir, I much desire your further acquaintance."

"Not so," replied he. "We have meddled with great matters, too great to be noised abroad. Let us part as strangers; and if peradventure our paths should cross in days to come, as strangers let us meet."

Thus it came about that when some months later (through my earnest endeavour, let me confess it) we met in the back room of honest Tom Davies, we met as strangers, nor did a word of our strange adventure of Coronation Day ever escape us. Unwilling, however, that so romantick a tale should perish, I now set it down for posterity; only taking the liberty of concealing a name otherwise known to fame, the illustrious name of Dr. S-m: J-hns-n.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Sidney Rowland's "The McGregor Affair" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. The story is told in a simple, unaffected style, befitting the simple, slow-minded porter who is the chief character. There are other characters in the story who are neither simple nor slow-minded — namely, Messrs. Burke and Hare, the notorious Resurrectionists; but we were attracted to the author's point of view of keeping the "big" characters — the body-snatchers — in the background and putting his "little man" in the center of the stage.

Mr. Rowland is in his very early thirties, married, and since the summer of 1951 he has been an advertising copywriter for Prentice-Hall, Inc. He has his B.A. from Ohio Wesleyan, Phi Beta Kappa, and his M.A., in journalism, from Ohio State. In 1947–48 he attended the Columbia University School of Professional Writing — in the short-story workshop conducted by Paul Gallico. Mr. Gallico encouraged Mr. Rowland, urging him to continue writing. Some of the short stories Mr. Rowland wrote for "homework" were of the same type as "The McGregor Affair" — stories with historical characters and settings, a shading of satire, and an ironic fillip at the end. And to complete the picture of Mr. Rowland, we can add that while he was experimenting with words, he was earning his living at odd jobs — checking claims for a labor union insurance fund, working as a freight stevedore in the West 33rd Street yards of New York City, being a grill-counterman at International House, and acting as a shipping assistant for the Geological Society of America.

No need to worry about Sidney Rowland . . . With the publication of his first story, he is on his way. Maybe it will be a long voyage home — but he'll get there, he'll reach the Port of Print with his colors flying . . .

THE McGREGOR AFFAIR

by SIDNEY ROWLAND

IT WAS ONE EVENING IN MID-MARCH, while he was washing out the supper soup-kettle, that McGregor finally decided he would have to get rid of Aggie. The evening's business about his bottle of Old Caledonia whiskey made up his mind.

Having a wife who drank too much

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and too often was bad enough, especially to a man who earned his living by portering boxes and goods about the city and never had much money to begin with. One-third of his income in the past five years had gone to buy Aggie liquor. But about a month ago she had started to become selfish about the whiskey he brought home to her. She would clutch the bottle to her bosom — scraggly gray hair tumbling wildly down into her eyes, dirty wool dress enveloping her great, swollen body like a huge grain sack — and maudlinly but definitely inform him that he could not have the single shot she ordinarily allowed him from the pint.

In four weeks McGregor had been able to sneak one lone drink from the seventeen pints of whiskey he had bought with his own cash.

Last night he had rebelled. He had brought home two pints of Old Caledonia instead of the usual one, and soberly informed Aggie that one of them was his own personal property, and that under no circumstances was she to pour herself a drink from it.

Late today McGregor had carried a box of tanbark over to the Museum for Mr. Burke, the Irish cobbler in the basement shop across the lane. When he had returned, he had found both Aggie's bottle and his own empty, and Aggie on the corner bed in a stupor. Instead of a shot of Old Caledonia, to warm him up after the hike across the city, he had only had two bowls of pea soup.

To any honest citizen of Edinburgh, enough was surely enough.

McGregor glanced across the tenement room at Aggie, a mountainous heap snoring loudly on the bed. He went over and gently opened Aggie's mouth. Aggie always snored when her mouth was closed, never when it was open.

He wondered if he could do it. Murder was a new idea to McGregor.

McGregor got his brilliant idea on how to murder Aggie ten days later.

For more than a week, during his long hours of work on the streets of the city, he had mulled over his problem.

Brute force was out. McGregor could never strike Aggie over the head, or any such thing, and bluff out to the police investigators that her death had been an accident. He did not have the nerve or the acting ability for any such scheme, and he knew it.

Poisoning was also impossible. McGregor did not know what poison to use, or where to buy it, and probably could not afford to buy it in the first place.

It would be difficult to lure Aggie to a distant, lonely spot in the country, kill her and hide the body, and let it be supposed that his wife had simply disappeared. Aggie had not been out of the tenement room in two years, and had no enthusiasm for lengthy hikes.

It seemed unlikely that Aggie would drink herself to death in the immediate future. Whiskey did not

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kill the woman, merely made her fatter.

McGregor had almost been ready to give up the idea when he suddenly found the answer to his problem — found it one evening in an alley a short distance from his home.

Mr. Burke, the cobbler, had stopped by earlier in the afternoon, and asked him to carry another box of tanbark over to the Museum at 7 o'clock. McGregor had gone across the lane after supper to Burke's cobbling shop, and Mr. Burke had helped him hoist the crate of tanbark to his shoulders. Mr. Hare, the owner of the hotel for transients next to the cobbling shop, had been there, too, and stood leering in a corner while McGregor was prepared for his trip. McGregor did not like Mr. Hare.

Finally, McGregor had got under way, and started on his journey across the darkened city.

Four squares from the shop, as he was passing down a deserted alley, the tanbark had begun to slide about inside the crate, and McGregor had set the box down to adjust his load.

It was then that he first noticed the long, dark strand of hair, trailing out from one corner of the crate.

For some time the full significance of the hair did not register with McGregor.

Several times, now, in the last few months, McGregor had carried loads of tanbark to the Museum for Mr. Burke, but he had never thought much about the journeys, or why the Museum — which was really a school where they taught surgery to medical students — should be in need of so much tanbark.

McGregor had heard, from gossipy neighbors, that Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare were supposed to be resurrectionists, and rob graveyards to sell the bodies to medical schools. Lately, Mr. Burke did seem to have more money than his cobbling would justify, but McGregor had never quite believed the resurrectionist story.

He was also vaguely aware that Mr. Hare — at his transient hotel — always seemed to have a type of guest who came once, stayed only a short while, and never returned. All of Mr. Hare's customers seemed to drink a great deal, too.

McGregor had never thought much about these things. Now before him, trailing out from the box, appeared this lock of hair. The lock of hair made him suddenly think.

Hair, McGregor realized, was usually accompanied by a person, on whom the hair had grown. If there was hair in the box, there must be a person in the box. If there were a person in the box, the person — quite probably — was dead.

When McGregor reached this point in his thinking he became so alarmed that he had to move a short distance away from the box — before his train of thought could be continued.

If the body of a dead person were in the box — a box he was carrying to the medical school — then the neighbors must be right! Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare must be resurrectionists.

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Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare must be in the business of selling corpses to the Museum, and he, McGregor, had already carried quite a few bodies from the cobbling shop to the medical school — without knowing it!

McGregor now stared uneasily up the alley, not in fear that a policeman might appear and discover him with his illegal load, but because an even more terrible thought was crowding into his mind.

All the resurrectionists he had ever heard of got their bodies from graveyards. They were carried directly from the graveyards to the medical schools. But none of the bodies he had carried to the Museum had come from graveyards. They had all come directly from Mr. Burke's shop, and if Mr. Burke had got them from a graveyard to begin with, there would have been no need to take them first to his own house.

The bodies had all come *out of Mr. Burke's shop*. There was only one way they had come *into* the shop.

They had walked in.

McGregor was slow-witted, but not too slow-witted to see, now, what Burke and Hare had been doing.

McGregor glanced over at the lock of hair again. He suddenly recalled a tipsy old street woman, named Effie Mattoon, whom he had seen around the neighborhood from time to time, usually well along on a drunken binge. Effie Mattoon had hair similar in color to the lock protruding from the box — and he now remembered that last night, on the way home, he had seen Effie Mattoon through the window of Mr. Burke's shop, sitting in a chair with a bottle of whiskey in her hand.

McGregor looked cautiously up the alley, and then, grabbing up a loose, flat stone from the pavement, he began to pry open the top of the box.

In a few moments he was staring into the wide, dead eyes of Effie Mattoon.

McGregor took one long look, then he hammered down the lid.

Fifteen minutes later McGregor, having delivered the box to the Museum, walked slowly back across Edinburgh towards his home.

He had said nothing about his discovery to the Museum assistant with whom he had left the box. He had no intention, now, of saying anything whatever about what he had found — to Mr. Burke or to the police or to anyone else.

McGregor, once the lock of hair had started the wheels working in his head, had been carried by the sheer mental momentum of the one idea he had ever had in his entire life. . . .

It was three days before McGregor could begin to carry his plan into action. The principal difficulty he faced — and for McGregor it was a big difficulty — was getting Aggie out of the house at a time when Mr. Burke or Mr. Hare might see her, and when she was drunk enough to suit the needs of the plan.

The fact that Aggie had not been

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out of the house in two years was lucky in one way — Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare did not know her. Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare might not wish to sell the body of the wife of the man who carried their bodies to the Museum for them.

But Aggie's stay-at-home habits were also a stumbling-block in his scheme.

The first day after his amazing discovery, McGregor suggested casually to Aggie that for a change she might enjoy going down the street to a tavern, instead of having him bring home the usual pint. Aggie had merely laughed, as if McGregor had been trying to make a joke, and helped herself to a swig from the most recent bottle of Old Caledonia.

That evening, McGregor decided not to bring home any more liquor. He was hopeful that by the next afternoon, when Aggie's supply was sure to have run out, she might be driven into the street by thirst.

But the next day, when her bottle was dry, Aggie did not venture into the street. Instead, she buttonholed McGregor with one huge, fat hand, glared at him balefully, and ordered him to buy a bottle on his way home.

Not knowing what else to do, McGregor brought home a bottle.

On the third day McGregor awoke at dawn and was struck with a new thought. The easiest way to get Aggie out of the house, drunk, was first to get her dead drunk, and then carry her out. He glanced over at the mountainous Aggie, slumbering.

She would be a big load, but he was used to carrying heavy loads.

That evening McGregor brought home two bottles of Old Caledonia, and mutely handed both of them to Aggie. Aggie looked at him suspiciously for a moment, but then her eyes fell on the second bottle and her attention was completely absorbed. She hastily opened one, and poured herself a drink.

Three hours later Aggie lay in a stupor on the bed. McGregor went to the door of the apartment and peered out, to make sure the coast was clear. Returning, he squatted by the bed, seized one of Aggie's arms and one of her legs, and with a quick motion, slung her over his back like a great netful of fish.

Grunting under the weight, McGregor carefully made his way through the hall of the apartment and out into the dark street. The street was empty, and a short, panting journey brought him to the front of Burke's cobbling shop.

McGregor deposited Aggie in the street and went up to Burke's cellar window. A curtain was drawn, but within McGregor could hear the sounds of a noisy party. Mr. Hare's voice came to him, cursing half-drunkenly, and the loud, boisterous laughter of women.

McGregor had not been able to think out too clearly what he was going to do. He had reasoned, however, that if he left Aggie slumbering in the vicinity of Mr. Burke's doorstep, and somehow made Mr. Burke

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aware that she was there, she would immediately be taken inside, and eventually be transported to the Museum.

He thought Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare would be glad to be saved the bother, this time, of supplying the liquor and getting their victim drunk.

McGregor made his way back to the street, hoisted Aggie to his shoulders again, and carried her to Burke's doorstep. Quietly he set her down once again. Then he leaned over and carefully closed Aggie's mouth. When Aggie slept with her mouth closed, she always snored.

In a moment Aggie gave vent to a labored, stentorian rattle.

McGregor listened for just a moment — to make sure his wife continued snoring.

Then he walked quickly back home.

A minute later in Burke's front room, William Hare, halfway through a raucous version of a County Tyrone drinking song, stopped abruptly.

Burke looked over at him questioningly.

"I thought I heard a funny noise outside," Hare remarked in a flat tone.

Burke got up from a chair and went to the door. Margaret Hare, who had been dancing a jig in the corner, followed him. Helen McDougal, lying on a bed with a bottle in her hand, looked up after them sleepily.

Burke cautiously opened the door and stepped into a hallway. In a moment he returned to the shop, an exultant gleam bright in his eye.

"We've got a shot tonight," he exclaimed gruffly to Hare. "Brought herself here on her own two legs and fell asleep in the doorway!"

Hare followed Burke out of the door. In a short time the two men had dragged Aggie into the front room.

Burke and Hare and Margaret Hare stared appraisingly at the large, amorphous form before them. Helen McDougal struggled to her feet and joined them.

"She's too fat — we'll never get her over to the Museum," Hare said angrily.

"McGregor can carry her" — Burke frowned — "but we may have to pay him double."

Burke leaned down speculatively, as if curious about the details of Aggie's anatomy, and opened her mouth.

Aggie abruptly stopped snoring.

"Watch her there — she may wake up!" Hare said sharply. "Here, I'll give you a hand."

He glanced meaningfully at his wife and Helen McDougal. The two women, without a word, went through a rear door into an inner room.

"Quick now," Hare muttered, and kneeled and pinned the woman's arms to the floor.

Burke crouched beside Hare and cupped his hands. . . .

At 8 o'clock the next morning McGregor knocked loudly on the door of Burke's shop. He had spent a sleepless night at home. Not having Aggie

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beside him had made him feel lonely, and this, together with his natural concern about what was happening across the street, had kept him awake through the night.

McGregor did not quite know what he was going to say to Mr. Burke. He wanted to know, as soon as possible, if Aggie had been "processed." He knew, of course, that he could not ask Mr. Burke a direct question.

The shop door opened narrowly and Mr. Burke stuck his head out. He looked sleepy and irritable. He stared angrily at McGregor.

"What do you want, at this time of the morning?"

McGregor eyed Mr. Burke hesitantly. "Nothing, Mr. Burke. I just wondered if you might have some work for me today."

Burke started to shake his head emphatically; but then a queer look of surprise came to his face. He opened the door a little wider.

"Well, as a matter of fact, you've hit it just right. I want you to take another box of bark to the Museum today."

McGregor was aware that Burke was inspecting him closely, as if he might be thinking that McGregor had somehow become gifted with a foreknowledge of human events.

"It's a big crate this time — guess you'll want double."

"Never mind!" McGregor said, almost too quickly. "I'll carry it same as usual."

McGregor was again aware that Burke was inspecting him closely.

"Come back at supper-time, when it's dark," Mr. Burke told him. "The box will be ready for you then."

McGregor murmured thanks, and Mr. Burke closed the door.

Shortly after dark, McGregor knocked again at the shop. He had spent all day at home. Now that the night was gone, he had discovered that he did not miss Aggie any more, and life alone in the apartment was very pleasant. He had done nothing all day but lounge around, enjoying the place without Aggie.

It was like being a young man again, McGregor thought.

The shop door opened, and Mr. Burke beckoned him inside.

"We have it in the back," he told McGregor. "Mr. Hare and I will help you load."

Ten minutes later McGregor emerged from the door, a heavy wooden box on his back.

Mr. Burke watched McGregor proceed slowly up the lane.

"Funny man, that McGregor," Mr. Burke said to Mr. Hare, who was standing behind him. "Didn't want any extra money. He almost seemed to enjoy carrying a double load!"

Half an hour later McGregor arrived at the Museum. He was perspiring from his effort, but inside he was experiencing a strange, warm glow of happiness. The long trip he had made across town, he kept telling himself, was his trip to freedom. In the box on his back was the source of all his unhappiness. Once he had delivered the box to the Museum, he

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would be free of all trouble and worry.

McGregor set the crate down at the side door of the Museum and rang for the medical student who generally received it. The affair was quickly finished. The student gave him a small tip, and closed the door. McGregor stood alone in the darkness.

He looked about, wondering where to go. It must be ten years, he thought, since he had enjoyed a free evening — ever since he had married Aggie.

McGregor thought back to the days of his youth, when he had enjoyed many free evenings. Memories surged back — memories of pleasant hours spent on the town, out with girls, at taverns.

Suddenly he knew what he would do this evening. He would go to a tavern. He would drink, let himself go. He would celebrate being finally free of Aggie.

He walked out into the street before the Museum and glanced up the way. In the distance he saw a sign — Quincannon's Tavern.

McGregor went rapidly up the street.

Shortly before midnight McGregor raised his head sleepily from a table in the rear of Quincannon's. He had taken quite a number of drinks and the tavern room now loomed hazily around him, swirling in dim shadows.

From out of the haze a man came up and sat down beside him.

"Well, now, McGregor, I'm surprised to see you here!" the man said to him.

McGregor looked at the man, but could not see him clearly.

"Are you a fren' o' mine?" he inquired.

"That I am. Don't you know me?"

"I'm 'fraid not," McGregor said. "Bin' shelebratin' t'night. I'm drunk."

"You should go home," the man told him. "Want me to give you a hand?'

McGregor's head bobbled. "Wish you would, wish you would. Should go home, just like you say."

He tried to get up, but failed. The man took him by the arm and helped him to his feet. Arms linked, the two made their way out of Quincannon's.

In the darkness of the street the two were joined by a shadowy, disjointed individual, who seemed to have been waiting for McGregor's friend.

"Sure, and it's McGregor you have there," exclaimed the second man.

"We'll have to get somebody else to carry the boxes, now," murmured Mr. Burke to Mr. Hare, just as the trio rounded a corner and came within sight of the cobbling shop.

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THE AUTOMOBILE GAME

by MICHAEL GILBERT

FASHIONS CHANGE FASTER THAN human nature. Fifty years ago the Scotland Yard detective was a big blundering booby, with no imagination, no luck, and size twelve boots — you remember Inspector Lestrade. Nowadays he gets rather more of his just desserts. Even his severest critics recognize him as a worker: a professional, who gets his results the same way other professionals do — more by perspiration than by inspiration.

What isn't realized, even yet, though, is that in detection the hardest work can be the work that is done by the human brain.

I cite the case of Miss Hatter . . .

Miss Hatter was a quiet old lady. She lived in Osbaldestone Road, in Highbury, and she occupied the floor of a house which had been built about the time of the Great Exhibition for an upper middle-class family and had been going slowly downhill ever since.

When it was first put up, Osbaldestone Road was a back street. Then, when they opened the new bypass and turned the northbound traffic into it, it became a highway overnight. And most of the front gardens were overbuilt with one-storey shops and most of the quiet house owners left; and the houses got divided up into flats; and people like Miss Hatter came in.

Miss Hatter didn't mind the traffic that roared past her window. She was a little deaf, and she found it companionable. Also, as it developed later, she had another reason for liking it.

It was never suggested that she was odd — not even that she was a recluse in the proper sense of the word. She said, "Good morning" to her acquaintances when she met them in the queues, and she was quite sensible, and her rooms were reasonably clean. She didn't keep sixteen cats, or suffer from dangerous delusions, or anticipate the End of the World.

She just kept herself to herself.

One late afternoon, in early autumn, the ground-floor front, not having heard Miss Hatter moving for nearly twenty-four hours, got alarmed and went to the police. And the police said, "Oh, dear, another of those, is it?" and went back with the ground-floor front and upstairs and opened the door — it wasn't locked, you just walked upstairs and straight in — and they found Miss Hatter.

Only it wasn't quite what they'd expected. It wasn't a stroke or heart failure or cumulative malnutrition.

Miss Hatter's head had been beaten in.

Quite early in the investigation, Chief Inspector Hazlerigg — he was D.D.I. at the time — put his finger on it when he said to his Superintendent, "It's difficult, sir, to believe that anyone could have been so completely

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alone. She has no family. Her father and mother are dead. Her only sister lives in South Africa — they sent each other a card every Christmas. She'd one or two acquaintances — shop and street acquaintances — but nothing more."

"What did she live on?" said the Superintendent.

"Dividends," said Hazlerigg. He produced a thick, much-folded bundle of multicolored script, and the Superintendent glanced through them.

"Good stuff," he said. "Quite a lot of it, too. Well, this is one of the things the murderer may have been looking for."

"He'd have had his work cut out to find them," said Hazlerigg, "unless he'd known exactly where to look." He explained where his searchers had found them.

"Very ingenious," said the Superintendent. "Wonderful ideas these old ladies get. You'd think they'd never heard of banks. Was she killed for these, do you think?"

"I don't think so," said Hazlerigg. "After all, Share Certificates aren't like bearer bonds. They're not a lot of use to anyone except the owner. I think more likely she was killed for cash."

"Cash?"

Hazlerigg explained, "These shares would bring her in about £500 a year. I've had her budget checked up as closely as I can. Her room cost her a pound a week, and she spent about a pound a week on food. She never went out — except to shop and go to Church on Sunday evenings. She didn't give to charities. She hated holidays. She *must* have saved something like £300 a year — probably more."

"How long had she been at Osbaldestone Road?"

"Ten years."

"Three thousand pounds, probably in banknotes," said the Superintendent thoughtfully. "Yes, I suppose that could be it. I expect she kept the cash in an old stocking. Did she have any visitors?"

"We've traced three, so far. Her landlady came up sometimes — to join her in a cup of tea —"

"It didn't look to me like a woman's crime," said the Superintendent.

"No, sir. Then the vicar visited her about once a month."

"H'm —"

"And a distant cousin — a Mr. Webb. He's almost her only relative in London. He says he saw her last sometime in early summer. And before that, about Christmas. A big, beery person — looked as if he could have done with the money, too."

"Sounds more hopeful than the vicar," agreed the Superintendent. "I suppose you've —"

"Oh, yes. Nothing to go on at all. He lives in a basement flat at Muswell Hill. Comes and goes as he likes. He says he was in bed all that day and most of the next — with 'flu."

"Let me see now." The Superintendent ruffled through the files. "It was pretty certain that she was killed on the evening of the Thursday, wasn't

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it? The day before we were called in —"

"Yes. Between four and six in the evening."

"About dusk — and there was a bit of fog."

"That's right."

"And there's no reason to suppose that the murderer was someone who had visited her before."

"Except that he seemed to know where the money was — if it was money he came for. There was no sign of a search having been made."

"It's a point. But he might have been a visitor we haven't found out about."

"Yes."

"Or someone who knew where the money was but hadn't actually been there before."

"It's possible."

"In fact, almost anyone could have walked in, in the dusk, knocked out Miss Hatter and helped himself."

"Yes."

"Then we haven't really got anywhere at all."

"Not yet, sir," said Hazlerigg.

That was when the work really started.

Everything in the room was taken out for scrutiny. Everything was listed and docketed and tested for fingerprints and scrutinized and, if it looked interesting, photographed in several positions.

The only fingerprints which came to light were Miss Hatter's and her landlady's, except for a broad and masculine-looking set, which caused some excitement until they were proved to belong to the Superintendent, who had absent-mindedly placed one hand on the mantelpiece when viewing the scene of the crime.

Altogether a number of objects were unearthed which cast odd sidelights on the day-by-day existence of a solitary and religious-minded old lady, but only one item proved in any way puzzling.

Inspector Hazlerigg sat in his office looking at it, or rather at them, for the exhibit was six thick composition books. They were well thumbed, but neat and legible. Each contained about 40 plain-ruled foolscap-sized pages, and five of the books were full (and the sixth almost full) of Miss Hatter's neat writing.

"Do you think it's some sort of code," suggested Sergeant Pickup.

"If Miss Hatter was the emissary of a Foreign Power," said Hazlerigg shortly, "I'm Dick Turpin."

"What does it mean, then?"

"GR DAI WRG 9072 B WP 2436 BL CHE GG 909," said Hazlerigg. "I tried it on the cipher people, but they couldn't get anywhere with it — or they haven't yet. They're still trying."

"Looks too logical to be a cipher," said Pickup. "I mean it's mad, but it sort of looks sensible at the same time."

"If you can make any sense out of that —" said Hazlerigg irritably. He had missed his sleep for two nights and was beginning to feel it.

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"It's those books, sir," he said. "We found one actually under Miss Hatter's chair and the others in the cupboard."

"Good Lord," said the Superintendent. He was staring at the last five groups. "BL FD 8 PR 9293. What a coincidence!"

"What is it, sir?"

"It's *me*," said the Superintendent.

His subordinates looked at him blankly.

"My car, I mean. A blue Ford — 8. Registration Number PR 9293."

"A car watcher!" said Hazlerigg and Pickup simultaneously.

"I always wondered how she spent all her spare time," said the Superintendent.

That was when they *really* got down to work.

"It's all we've got to go on," said Hazlerigg. "We'll do it systematically."

He had the whole of the detective staff of the Division at it, and it wasn't long before the uniformed Branch were called in as well. Anyone with a quarter of a moment to spare found themselves involved in Hazlerigg's automobile game.

He discovered early that there is a great division in the ranks of mankind: some know about automobiles, others don't.

Probationary Detective Constable Walkinshaw, for instance, immediately solved BL CHE — Blue Chevrolet, he said. "That's the Doctor's little job. I've seen it up and down the streets this last six months. He had a gray Riley coupe before, and before that a black drop-head —"

"You're on," said Hazlerigg, and enrolled him permanently.

There were 227 closely written pages to be sorted out and interpreted.

"I wish she'd dated 'em," said Sergeant Pickup.

"Well, we can place some of them from the doctor's visits," said Hazlerigg. "Get hold of his log book."

"And the bus schedules," suggested Pickup. They had soon spotted the difference between B and TB. "You see what I mean. The trolley buses have to keep to the same order, they can't pass each other. But the gasoline buses are sometimes ahead and sometimes behind —."

"Where's it all going to get you to when you have worked it out?" asked Inspector Martin, who had come over from a neighboring Division on other business and had already overstayed his intended visit by more than three hours — and incidentally had covered himself with glory by identifying S.G.T.V. as a "small green tradesman's van," and a very mysterious entry H? M 3 ? 24 as a "motor hearse" belonging to the local undertaker.

"I've no idea," said Hazlerigg cheerfully. His eyes were gritty from lack of sleep, but he was lit by the invisible flame which warms a policeman with the inner certainty that he is onto something.

"I think I've got the hang of those odd little sections when none of the regulars seem to put in an appear-

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ance," said Pickup. "I think there were times when she couldn't sleep. There's a big overhead street light outside her house, and she could play this game just as well after dark."

"Of course," said Hazlerigg softly. "They must be the all night lorries coming into London. Check with the Road Transport people."

This proved unexpectedly to be the first fruits of their work, because Road Transport identified all the lorries very easily except for one — an S B V RT ?? 55 (which in Miss Hatter's shorthand was a very small black van) and which proved to belong to an enterprising gentleman who ran stolen poultry into London for the early market, and was extremely upset when an accurate schedule of his movements was produced for him to explain.

"They can't say we're wasting our time," said Hazlerigg, "Press on."

They were getting good at it now. They could identify their "regulars" at a glance, and dates and even times of day were becoming increasingly certain.

The end came quite suddenly, as the end often does.

"Didn't that chap Webb say he'd visited Miss Hatter in midsummer. What's his car — an Austin 7 RHQ 3232? Here you are — June 15 — about tea-time."

"And before that at Christmas," said Pickup. They found that one, too, without any difficulty.

"My God," said Hazlerigg. "What fools we've been!"

In silence they turned back to the last book — the one they had found actually under Miss Hatter's chair. It was the last entry but one on the final page.

"A 7 RHQ 3232."

"And Webb," said Hazlerigg, "was in bed all day with a cold, was he?"

He reached for the telephone.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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IF WISHES WERE HORSES *by GUY CULLINGFORD* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	". . . sound mystery whose solution may give you a good surprise." (LGO)	". . . amusing, touching, and endearingly related. Great fun." (AdV)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"Essential . . . good Ben Ray Redman introduction. Vintage." (SC)	"No mystery reader's permanent shelf can be complete without this volume." (DBH)	
". . . plausibly extravagant plot . . . a rather nice stew." (JS)	"Miss Ford has invented one of the most vicious characters of current times." (DBH)	
". . . one of the most dependable, contenting and steadily productive writers of the detective story." (JS)	"Well concealed puzzle matched by capable English detecting." (DD)	
"There's plenty of action in this tale, fast moving and thoroughly exciting." (FC)	"Nice handling, but some angles take getting used to." (SC)	
". . . fierce silliness . . . total irresponsibility in construction as well as conception." (JS)	". . . superbly tricky craftsmanship . . . puzzle is unusually well fleshed with rich characterizations . . ." (AB)	
". . . a fine psychological study . . ." (FC)	". . . strictly a psychological study . . ." (DBH)	
". . . grubby kind of circumstantiality . . . lacks plausibility . . . interest" (JS)	". . . believable details of middle class . . . high narrative interest . . ." (AB)	
". . . pleasing, amusingly written . . . hot if dubious resolution . . ." (JS)	". . . literate and witty . . . well-sketched characters." (AB)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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MOLLY, THE PRIVATE EYEFUL

by DICK ASHBAUGH

To Miss Miriam Kennedy,
Dexter Hall,
State University.

Dearest Mimi:

You certainly gave me some job! I don't know how I'm going to keep an eye on Paul Harrison, and still learn all that dumb sophomore stuff we've got in high school this year. If we weren't sisters, and I didn't need the $2 a week you promised, I'd call the whole thing off. We've got Miss Hodgkins in English, and she says she's going to teach us to speak and write so we make sense if she has to pound it into our heads with a mallet.

Well, I'd better give you the latest news on Paul as that's what you're paying me for. I saw him yesterday with a girl. A bunch of us went to the Malted Milk Shop after watching football practice. I hope you don't mind but I wore your new cashmere sweater which I accidentally stumbled across in your closet.

I figured you didn't like it or you would have taken it back to State with you.

Frankly I looked neat. A man in front of the Malt Shop said, "Woof!" when he saw me. This man was no high-school boy. He must have been at least nineteen. Tommy Bridges was in the shop but he was with some drips, so we didn't sit near them or throw straws at them or stuff. I was with Tootie and Sally. Tommy looks real cute since he let his crew-cut grow out. He looked stinky last summer.

You should give me extra for expenses if I have to follow Paul around places like the Malted Milk Shop. You can't spy without something nourishing, so I had a hot fudge. Paul looked okay. He had on a blue tie. I'll have to close now. Love and kisses,

Molly, The Girl Spy.

Tuesday.
Study Period (I have to be sneaky like I'm doing algebra).

Dear Mimi:

I don't think you should have gotten so mad about the cashmere. I don't like the color anyhow. Another thing, you can't hold up my pay. There's a law. At least, I think there's a law. If I were you I certainly wouldn't worry about that girl Paul was with. All that dopey blonde hair. And I'll bet she spends hours on her face and uses all kinds of creams to get that kind of skin. Tootie said nobody could have a figure like that without wearing falsies. You don't look half bad when you just sling yourself together.

When they went out Paul stopped at our table and said hello. He didn't

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say, "Hello, sprout," or anything silly. He said real nice, "Hello, Molly, how are you?" Then he stood there twirling his hat and asked about Mother and Dad. After that he sort of fumbled around like he was going to ask about somebody else.

Finally he said, "How's Spot?" Spot goes over to their house every day, Paul says.

The blonde stood by the cashier and just glared. Finally she said, "Paul, after all—" Sally says her name is Sylvia Prentice and her father is the one who is running for mayor. They have money — which accounts for the cream-color convertible. We all thought she looked too hard and slinky. You certainly have nothing to worry about. Love,

Molly.

Sunday afternoon.

Dear Mimi:

I got your letter yesterday and for heaven's sake don't get so excited. I'm spying as fast as I can. You should never have had that fight with Paul and returned his ring before you went back to State. Thanks for the $2 which I certainly had coming, as hard as I worked the last couple of days.

It looks like there's going to be plenty of spying, so I swore Sally in as assistant. I know you said not to tell a soul, but Sal is okay. She signed a contract on the back of my music book. If she yackety yaks I can sue her.

The only trouble with this spying business is that it's getting all mixed up with politics. The other evening at dinner Daddy was really raving. He says if the Prentice crowd gets in office it's curtains. They're as crooked as a dog's hind leg, and they're tied up with a big upstate gambling crowd.

I mentioned innocent-like that Paul was going with Sylvia Prentice. Daddy threw up his hands and yelled, "Oh, no!" Then he told how this crowd works. First, they try to get to some young newspaperman, and since Paul is one of the smartest reporters in town, naturally they'd go after him. Old man Rotheroe, the publisher, who usually likes a fight, Daddy says, just doesn't seem to want to take sides in this. That's the only reason Daddy can see why he doesn't attack the Prentice crowd. Maybe somebody sold him a bill of goods. Daddy's on a civic committee with some other men, and he asked me to get some kids to help mail letters to the people. He says if the paper won't come out with the facts, the committee will.

I got Tootie and Sal and some other kids together Saturday and we mailed until we were blue. Did you ever lick 842 stamps in a row? I hope it does some good, but it's just the kind of stuff people throw in the waste basket without even opening.

Not much news about Paul. I mean personal stuff. When we went out to lunch yesterday, the convertible and the blonde were parked in front of the newspaper office. Pretty soon Paul came out, and she slid over

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and he got in the driver's seat. She was simply swimming in mink. Paul has a new hat. Gray. I'll have to write the rest later as I have writer's cramp. Love,

Molly.

Monday.
Art Class

Dear Mimi:

This is a caboose on the letter I wrote yesterday. Good thing we have art class this morning and it's a snap for me. I had my passenger pigeon all colored in twenty minutes and handed it in. We're doing birds. Some of the kids make a terrible mess of it.

Since I have the rest of the period I'll tell you about Saturday night. As you know it was Mother's birthday, so Daddy simply tore the top off and took us to the Riviera Gardens for dinner. By the way, Mother got your package with the yummy pantie and bra set. She was a little flustered, but if you think it's too fancy and she'll give it back to you later, you're out of your mind. Daddy asked her at dinner if she was wearing it and she gave him *such* a look.

I got in some real good spying because right smack bang at the next table was a big party of the Prentice people. Naturally Paul was with them looking very mellow in a dinner jacket. I won't tell you how spectacular the blonde looked in white satin, because you've got enough trouble with Botany as you told me. I know how it is. Hodgkins is driving me berserk.

There were about a dozen people in the Prentice party. The women were out of this world, but a couple of the men looked like they needed a shave, even if they did wear big diamonds. Daddy told Mother they were a couple of Mr. Prentice's chums from upstate.

The best part of the spying, though, came when I went in the ladies' lounge. The blonde and a gorgeous brunette were in there powdering their noses, so I kind of slouched up and got out my lipstick. It's the new one called Wild Strawberry. The two of them were talking like mad and the brunette said, "I don't get it, Sylvia. Why are you playing around with this hick newspaperman? He's cute, but good heavens!"

The blonde stopped combing that slinky hair and said, "Look, Eunice, I'm swinging a little deal for Daddy. If I keep this boy in line until after the election, I get a trip to Europe."

The brunette said, "I get it now. Nice going."

Then the blonde leaned real close to the mirror and said, "I'd even marry him if I had to. Then throw him aside like an old glove."

This made me excited and I dropped my Wild Strawberry. It took a funny bounce and left a nice red streak on the back of the blonde's dress. Well, she turned on me and screamed something awful. But the worst thing she said was, "I can't understand why people bring their children to a place like this." Imagine that. *Children!* I'll get even with her some day.

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When I got back to the table Paul was there. I guess he had just stepped over to say hello, but it wasn't working out at all. Mother and Dad were very stiff and formal, and I think Paul was glad I came back because he asked me to dance.

Daddy started to say something but Mother kicked him under the table and he shut up. As soon as we were on the floor Paul started hedging around. I knew right away what he wanted to say so I said it for him. "If you're worrying about Mimi," I said, "you can stop right now. She's doing terrific. In fact, Mother and Daddy are really worried."

"Why are they worried?" he asked.

So I told him all about you being engaged to the captain of the football team, and the whole campus talking.

Then he asked if you would be home for Thanksgiving vacation. I said I didn't think so because his parents had asked you to come east and visit them on their Long Island estate. I told him how Mother and Daddy hoped you wouldn't run away and get married because they'd like to at least meet the boy.

Paul said, "So that's how it is." He had muscles in his jaw and he took me right back to the table after only one dance. I could have kicked myself for springing everything at once, because he's a swoony dancer.

There goes the bell so I'll have to close. Love,

Molly.

P.S. Have you ever met the football captain? M.

Thursday.

Dearest Mimi:

I got your special delivery when I came in from school this afternoon. Thanks *loads* for the extra money. Are you positive you want me to have the cashmere? It's a darling color.

Things are really happening around here. The election is next Tuesday and Daddy says it's going to be tough to beat the Prentice crowd. They've simply plastered the town. The worst thing that happened, though, is Paul. He quit the newspaper. At first Daddy was all excited and pleased and said that at last Paul was coming to his senses. Then, you know what the stinker did? You'd never guess in a million years. He took over as campaign manager for the Prentice crowd. Daddy simply turned purple and Mother made him lie down with an ice bag.

Sal and I have been spying on their headquarters, and that slinky creature won't let him out of her sight. The day Daddy had the ice bag, he called Paul and asked him to stop in after dinner. It was a very funny meeting and I couldn't make head or tail out of it. He talked real quiet to Paul and said he didn't see how a boy who had been raised right here in town could turn himself over to those outlaws. Paul kept fidgeting around and saying that maybe Daddy didn't understand, and things might come out all right after all. Daddy snorted.

There was one other funny thing. You know that big picture we have

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of you on the piano? The glamour thing where your mouth is half open, and you look like you're getting ready to smooch Gregory Peck? Well, I was doing my spying through the dining-room door. When Daddy went out into the hall to answer the phone, Paul walked over and picked up the picture real easy. He didn't do anything — just stood there looking at it for about five minutes. Then he put it down very carefully just before Daddy came back in the room. What kind of goony business is that? Paul left not long after that, and Daddy sat there looking kind of beat.

Yesterday we didn't have any school because of some kind of teacher's meeting, so Sally and I lurked. Nothing much came of it. We did see Paul for about a minute in the Malted Milk Shop. He stopped for a second at the table and said, "How's the football captain?" I gave a wolf whistle and said we had a picture and he was terrific.

Sal's eyes got as big as raised doughnuts and she started to say something. I had to give her an awful belt on the shins to keep her quiet. Paul had those little muscles in his jaw again. I think he looks terrible. Well, cheerio and love,

Molly.

P.S. I'll mail this special as you'll want to know about Paul's jaw.

Saturday.

Dear Mimi:

I got your night letter. It's a good thing I was up prowling early and could answer the phone. Mother and Daddy are beginning to think there is something funny going on with all these letters we've been writing. Mother can't understand it because she says we fight like dogs and cats when you're home. They asked me at breakfast who was calling so early, so I fibbed and said it was Sally with some crazy idea.

The way it looks right now you'd be better off to forget Paul and get at that Botany. Especially after what happened yesterday afternoon. First of all, you can have the cashmere back, and I'll return the extra money as soon as I land a baby-sitting job. I think I earned the rest of the money, because all that spying took something out of me.

I don't know exactly how to tell you this but, like I say, if you'll submerge yourself in Botany, it won't seem so hard. Anyhow, yesterday afternoon Sally and I went downtown to the Paris Shoppe to see about her party formal. She gets a new one because she sold her bike and her father let her keep the money.

When we came out there were Paul and the blonde in the doorway of the jewelry store next door. They were very gay, and Paul was showing her this box with the ring. I couldn't swear but it looked a lot like the ring you gave back to him, which was the craziest thing you ever did. They didn't see us and went swinging off down the street with the blonde gushing and hanging onto his arm like mad. We followed them for a way,

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and Sally kept saying, "Well, I guess this is it. Poor Mimi!" I said, "Poor Mimi, my eye! She's better off if he's that kind of a dope."

So you see what I mean about the Botany. Would you like the pearl choker Uncle William gave me for Christmas last year? I think Mother's right, it's too old for me. I could send it if you want it. I'll have to write more later as I'm due to meet Sal in a few minutes.

Later:

I should write this whole thing over but it's too late. I just wanted to say that I got revenge. I got revenge on that slinky blonde. It was partly Sally's idea. She had it after I told her what happened in the ladies' lounge last Saturday night. Sally said, "Let's fix her wagon."

So we cooked up a little thing. We marched right over to the Prentice headquarters and sure enough there was the Slinker, curled around Paul in the office. They were in a little room off to one side.

In the big office were a lot of men who needed shaves and one of them asked us what we wanted. Sally said we had a singing telegram for Mr. Paul Harrison. She gets real bright sometimes. The men laughed so we went on in. Paul looked up surprised and said, "Molly, what are you doing here?"

The Slinker stood up and said, "Who are these children, Paul?"

That made Sally mad. "So it's children?" she said. "Well, you listen to me, you bleached beachcomber!" That was a line she got out of some movie, but when I asked her later she said she couldn't remember which one. Anyhow, it worked. The blonde got furious. "Paul," she said, "what's the meaning of this?"

Sally nudged me so I blurted everything. "You called Paul a hick newspaperman!" I yelled. "I heard you in the ladies' lounge at the Riviera. You can't deny it."

The blonde looked at Paul. "I never saw this little twirp before in my life."

"Is that so?" I screamed. "Well, you just go home and look at that white satin evening gown of yours. It's got my Wild Strawberry on the seat. And that stuff's indelible. It cost 69 cents!"

The blonde just stood there glaring, so I turned to Paul. "They're just using you, Paul. She was telling a friend that she's supposed to keep you in line until after the election, and then she gets a trip to Europe. She even said she'd marry you and then toss you aside like an old glove." I got all this out and then I was crying.

It took me a minute to get the tears out of my eyes, and then I saw the look on Paul's face. He was wearing a grim little smile. "Sylvia," he said, "you should have been an actress. I really thought you'd gone overboard."

For about 30 seconds the blonde looked at him and then she burst out laughing. She practically doubled up. "Overboard," she screamed. "Why

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you miserable little hick newspaperman. Of course we used you. You came in very handy, sonny boy. Now that everything's set you can go peddle your papers somewhere else. Go on, get out."

Then she started laughing again.

Paul got his coat and hat — and said, "Come on, kids."

At the doorway the blonde stopped him. "Here," she said, "for heaven's sake take this ridiculous little ring. I wouldn't wear it to a dog fight."

Paul caught the ring and put it in his pocket. He looked at her and he was smiling very quietly. "Thanks for the buggy ride," he said, "but if I were you I wouldn't order any steamship tickets."

Downstairs he grinned and gave each of us a little punch on the shoulder. "Well," he said, "you two characters nearly upset the apple cart. But I guess things will work out okay. Come on, we've got work to do."

Halfway across the Square Sally started babbling. "Anyway," she said, "you got your ring back."

"Yes," said Paul. "Thank heavens. I thought for a minute I wasn't going to get it. Scared me. I need it for somebody else."

"Jeepers," said Sally. "Then there's somebody *else*?" She started to say "Poor Mimi," again but I gave her a good poke in the ribs and she shut up fast.

At the newspaper office Paul went straight through to Mr. Rotheroe's private office, while we waited in the reception room. At first Paul talked loud and you could hear him pounding the desk. Then he was quieter and in about a half hour the door opened and they came out.

Mr. Rotheroe was shaking his head and saying, "Wonderful, Paul, wonderful! Now we're ready for the biggest sensation this town has ever seen. How did you ever get all the evidence?"

Paul smiled sort of grimly. "It was publicly quitting the paper and seeming to go all the way with the Prentice crowd that made them open up. Then they turned out facts and figures. I've got enough now to hang them all."

"Get at that typewriter and start hanging," said Mr. Rotheroe. "I'll get things rolling in the composing room. Don't waste a second."

Paul grabbed both of us by the arm and said, "Here's where you two go to work. Do you think you could get a gang of the kids together *now* to peddle my papers?"

We said sure, show us the telephone. I got hold of Tommy Bridges and made him captain of the boys. Then Sally and I went to work organizing the girls. Paul sat down at a typewriter and began rattling away like mad.

I've never been around a newspaper office before, especially when they're putting out a special edition. It's a madhouse. Paul took us right along with him. We watched the linotyping and plating. Then the presses rolled.

By that time we must have had 30 or 40 kids milling around outside. The

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circulation man gave them all different districts to cover. Some of the kids had their hot rods and they loaded up with papers and roared off.

The stuff Paul wrote was all over the front page in big type. It told the whole story about the Prentice crowd. You know how gentle Mr. Rotheroe usually is? Well, he kept banging Paul on the back and saying over and over, "That does it, my boy!" He was all excited and his eyeglasses kept falling off.

When things quieted down Paul took me to one side and said, "What's the name of that place?"

"What place?" I asked.

"That cage up at State."

"It isn't a cage," I said. "It's Dexter Hall and there's a phone right outside her door."

"Good," he said. "I'm going to find out about that football captain right now."

I started blubbering again and that stopped him. Of course I had to tell him that it was just a big goony fib about the football captain, and that I'd made it all up. At first I thought he was going to turn me over his knee. Instead he leaned over and gave me a peck on the cheek. Just a little peck. Sort of brotherly. And then he bolted for the phone. . . .

Hey, wait a minute! Why am I writing all this? I won't even get to mail it, because Paul said you're coming home on the evening train. Oh well, I'll keep it. Hodgkins said I might be a writer some day if I'd only apply myself. Maybe I can put this together and make a story out of it, and sign it with love, from Molly, The Private Eyeful.

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HOW DR. COFFEE WAS BORN

Was it John Carter, that eminent bookman, or David A. Randall, another eminent bookman, who wrote: "The detective story was born, like Athena from the head of Zeus, fully grown and armed to the teeth . . ."? Yes, that was true about "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin; but Lawrence G. Blochman's Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, the pathologist-detective, did not spring full-panoplied from the head of his creator — the birth of Dr. Coffee took longer, even longer than the normal nine months.

In the Fall of 1946, the late William MacHarg moved his O'Malley yarns from Collier's to the Saturday Evening Post. As the result of this change in precinct, Collier's began to look for a series detective to replace O'Malley. The writer chosen for the creation of a new series was Lawrence G. Blochman, who submitted a ten-page prospectus outlining the character of Dr. Coffee, his background in the imaginary midwestern city of Northbank, and data on his official and medical associates. The first story was written early in 1947 and published in Collier's later that same year.

But looking backward, Mr. Blochman now realizes that Dr. Coffee had been evolving in his subconscious for a much longer period — 30 years, to be exact, ever since he had covered a certain unsolved murder case as a police reporter for a California newspaper. In that case the police were completely stumped (and so was Mr. B. — unlike the typical reporter in fiction), and eventually the chief suspect was released, with a cloud of suspicion still hovering over him and his family broken up. If the doctor who performed the autopsy at that time knew as much about forensic medicine as Dr. Coffee knows now, that 30-year-old case would undoubtedly have been solved and the lives of an entire family saved from public disgrace.

Although a strong vein of forensic medicine runs through Mr. Blochman's earlier fiction, he did not become seriously interested in pathology until 1940. In that year, at the request of his publishers, Mr. Blochman lent an editorial hand to Dr. William McKee Germain, a distinguished pathologist, who was writing a book on laboratory medicine for the layman. The time Mr. Blochman spent in Dr. Germain's laboratories gave the eventual creator of Dr. Coffee his first real insight into the

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pathologist's job, both at the microscope and at the autopsy table. Since then Mr. Blochman has again "interned" in Dr. Germain's hospital lab and taken other refresher courses at the Bellevue morgue where Dr. Gonzales and his staff of experts in the New York Medical Examiner's office have furthered Mr. Blochman's pathological education; and the able staff of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington has also given Mr. Blochman invaluable information.

And so Dr. Coffee was born . . . The Dr. Coffee short stories have the smack of authenticity, born of first-hand knowledge of medical mysteries and scientific detection. Surely no critic would deny that Lawrence G. Blochman has donned the mantle of R. Austin Freeman, and that Dr. Coffee is the contemporary counterpart of Dr. Thorndyke — no mean comparisons and no mean praise!

CALENDAR GIRL

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

IF KENNETH WYMAN HAD BEEN GATHered to his fathers twenty-four hours sooner, he would have been quietly buried with few flowers, fewer tears, and no suspicion that he had been murdered. The coroner had signed him out as a case of heart failure. Even the insurance company which had written a $50,000 policy on his life was not fussy about *how* Wyman had died; it was *when* that mattered.

Kenneth Wyman had neglected to pay his last insurance premium. His policy had expired at midnight Wednesday, four hours after his wife Helen had last seen him alive. His body was not found until the early hours of Thursday morning. If Wyman had died after midnight, the company would refuse to pay the claim, even if the Widow Wyman cried her pretty little eyes out.

However, the claims adjuster for the Northbank agency of the insurance company was a fair-minded man, and he consulted Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist for Pasteur Hospital, who occasionally did an autopsy for the company. Was it possible, the claims adjuster wanted to know, to determine scientifically whether death had occurred before midnight?

The tall, big-boned pathologist ran his fingers through his sandy hair. "I can try," he said. "It would have been easier to establish the postmortem interval if I'd seen the body when it was found this morning. But

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there's a pretty fair chance that an autopsy will fix the time of death."

"That's just the trouble," the adjuster said. "The widow refuses permission for an autopsy."

Dr. Coffee set his jaw. "Then I'll take the job," he said, "including the job of getting permission."

As a rule, Dr. Coffee had an intense dislike of insurance jobs with a widow's mite at stake — if $50,000 could truthfully be called a mite. But he took the Wyman case without hesitation. Mrs. Wyman's attitude whetted his curiosity and aroused his suspicions. Why did she object to an autopsy which might be her only chance to establish her claim to the insurance? Did she have positive knowledge that Wyman's death had occurred *after* midnight? Or was she afraid an autopsy might reveal facts quite foreign to insurance?

Before he called on Helen Wyman, the pathologist made a few discreet inquiries about the dead man. He found that Kenneth Wyman was a journeyman photo-engraver who had risen to be a master printer. He was half-owner of Wyman & Prentiss, a small Northbank printing and lithographing firm which did a big business in girlie-girlie calendars. There had been some trouble with the postal authorities the year before, resulting in wholesale confiscations and the loss of some of their biggest customers — a disastrous year altogether. The current year's calendars, however, by a decorous use of shadow and an extra layer of gauze in the right places, had re-established the right of Wyman & Prentiss to use the mails, and by the next year the firm expected to have recovered its lost business.

Helen Wyman, before her marriage five years earlier, had been a photographer's model and had posed for many a Wyman & Prentiss calendar. Since her marriage, she had become a good bourgeois housewife in a good bourgeois neighborhood of Northbank.

She made a very pretty widow, although not a particularly sorrowful one, Dr. Coffee reflected, as she opened the door for him. She was a small, buxom, blue-eyed blonde, and black was quite becoming to her. She ushered the pathologist into a darkened living room, where a small, plump, red-faced young man in a shiny blue-serge suit sat drinking beer. "I've come on a very personal matter, Mrs. Wyman," Dr. Coffee said, looking pointedly at the plump young man.

"This is Ray Bowes." Helen Wyman made the presentation with a wave of her hand. "You can talk in front of Ray."

"Are you Mrs. Wyman's attorney, Mr. Bowes?"

"Nope," said Bowes. "I'm a photographer. But I've known Helen since she was so high, long before either of us went to work for that two-timing —"

"Stop it, Ray," Helen Wyman interrupted.

"Sorry."

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Dr. Coffee had barely stated his business when Bowes broke in with: "If you're from the insurance company, you're wasting your time. Helen already said no."

"You realize, of course," the pathologist said, "that your advice may deprive Mrs. Wyman of $50,000."

"We — Helen doesn't need his filthy money," Bowes said. "I can take care of her. Anyhow, it's not fifty thousand. It's only about half that. Wyman put his policy in hock about a month ago for twenty-four thousand."

"I see. Was your husband in financial trouble, Mrs. Wyman?"

"Not that I know of. He didn't tell me about the loan. I guess it must have been for the firm."

"What do you get out of this, Doctor?" Bowes demanded.

"My fee for a post-mortem examination is the same, no matter what report I make to the company. And I'm quite ready to turn the fee over to Mrs. Wyman in case I'm unable to establish her claim. Now I'd like you to tell me, Mrs. Wyman, everything that happened on the night you last saw your husband, including what you gave him for dinner."

Helen Wyman glanced at Bowes, who gave an almost imperceptible nod. "I'll try," she said. She spoke in low tones, looking at the floor.

Wyman had come home for dinner at about 6:30, as usual, she said. They'd had two or three cocktails while the steak was broiling. It was a thick steak, and Wyman liked his well done. After dinner he had listened to the baseball scores on the radio, then said he was going out to get some cigars. He never came back.

Mrs. Wyman had not been alarmed when her husband did not return immediately. He often stopped at a neighborhood bar for a beer. And since he easily lost track of time, she rarely waited up for him. The night before, she had done some mending and gone to bed to read. She must have fallen asleep with the light on; it was still burning when she woke up.

She'd been startled to find that it was daylight and that her husband's bed had not been slept in. She'd called Joe Prentiss, her husband's partner, but he was no help. She'd called several bars; they were closed. She'd looked in Wyman's study, just in case he had come in late and stretched out on the leather couch there. He wasn't there — and neither was his brief-case, which always stood on the floor beside his desk. The disappearance of the brief-case had shocked Helen into action. She was dialing the police station when the doorbell rang: a detective with the bad news.

Wyman's body had been found in an alleyway half a mile from his house. He had an abrasion on the back of his scalp, caused, the coroner said, by his falling and striking his head on the curb after a heart attack. There were no marks on the body except the cut on the head, which was not serious enough to have been fatal.

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And there was no sign of the briefcase.

"Thanks to your steak," Dr. Coffee said when Helen Wyman had finished, "I think I can help. Will you sign a permit for an autopsy?"

Helen Wyman glanced at Ray Bowes who had been watching her adoringly as she spoke. His expression did not change. She signed. "All right, I may as well," she said.

At 9 that night, Dr. Coffee called the Northbank police station and asked for Max Ritter, lieutenant of detectives. "Can you hop over to my lab right away, Max?" the pathologist asked.

"Have a heart, Doc," the detective protested. "I was just going home."

"I just stumbled on a magnificent bit of homicide, Max," Dr. Coffee said, "and I wanted you to be the first to know."

"Okay, Doc. Right over."

Twenty minutes later, the slim, dark, sad-eyed police detective walked through the pathology laboratory of Pasteur Hospital to Dr. Coffee's private office in the rear.

When the pathologist had finished telling him about his interview with Helen Wyman, Ritter asked, "And did you find out when the guy died?"

"I did. He died before midnight, all right. The digestive process had barely started. He must have been dead within an hour of leaving home."

"And he didn't die of a bad ticker?" Max Ritter asked.

"His heart was in perfect condition," Dr. Coffee said. "He was kicked to death."

Ritter opened his mouth, then closed it again without speaking. His prominent Adam's apple bobbled twice as he swallowed. Then he asked, "Doc, did you say *kicked?*"

"Kicked," the pathologist repeated, "or jumped on. I found thirteen perforations of the mesentery and small intestine. He died of hemorrhage and shock. There were three quarts of blood in the peritoneal cavity."

"I'll say he was kicked." The detective whistled. "What fooled the coroner? Didn't he even take the guy's clothes off?"

"He may have. There were no external bruises. Black-and-blue marks are microscopic hemorrhages into the tissue from the rupture of tiny blood vessels. When death occurs instantaneously or nearly so, the blood stops circulating and there is no discoloration."

"I get the impression," Ritter said, "that in some quarters Kenneth Wyman wasn't well liked. Does his wife know he was murdered?"

"I haven't told her," Dr. Coffee said, "but she may have private sources. After all, she did oppose the autopsy at first, although I think that most of the objection came from Ray Bowes."

"Should I stop the funeral, Doc? We don't want to dig this guy up again next week, do we?"

"It's not necessary, Max. I've got all of Mr. Wyman's essential organs here in the lab, and Dr. Mookerji will

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go to work on them tomorrow. I talked to the coroner tonight, and he'll take my word for everything, as long as he doesn't have to leave his pinochle game. Where do we go from here, Max? Do we tell Mrs. Wyman now? Or wait until after the funeral tomorrow?"

"Let's wait till after the funeral. That'll give me time to — Hello, Swami. What are you doing around here this time of night? I ought to report you to the union."

Dr. Motilal Mookerji, Pasteur Hospital's resident pathologist, had waddled into Dr. Coffee's office. Dr. Mookerji was a brilliant Hindu biochemist who constantly amazed his colleagues by his mastery of histology and bacteriology, his spheroidal contours, and his struggle with the American idiom.

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," he said. "Five times greetings, Leftenant. Somewhat skinny gentleman of asthenic type, just now arriving in laboratory, is requesting urgent interview with Dr. Coffee. Name of Prentiss."

Dr. Coffee started. "Prentiss? Send him in, Doctor."

The partner of Wyman & Prentiss seemed even taller and thinner than Dr. Mookerji's description as he towered above the pink turban of the squat, rotund Hindu. His thin lips were grim, his sallow cheeks sunken, and his gray eyes worried.

"I'm Joseph Prentiss. Glad I caught you in, Dr. Coffee," he said. "I called your home, and your wife said I'd probably find you here. So I — Pardon me, I seem to be intruding. I didn't know you had someone with you."

"This is Lieutenant Ritter of the Northbank police."

"Then my premonition was right. My partner's death is a police matter," Prentiss said.

"Lieutenant Ritter came over to discuss another case," the pathologist said. "What made you think Mr. Wyman's death was a police matter?"

"Mrs. Wyman told me you were performing an autopsy. So naturally I wondered —"

"The autopsy was an insurance matter." Dr. Coffee looked steadfastly at Max Ritter, who looked steadfastly at the wall. "The coroner says Mr. Wyman died of heart failure. Have you any reason to think otherwise?"

"No," said Prentiss with a wry smile, "except that I've heard that a fat insurance policy is sometimes almost as dangerous as a fatty heart."

"Mr. Wyman's insurance was heavily mortgaged," the pathologist said. "I understand he borrowed in order to prop up the firm."

Prentiss tightened his lips. "Ken Wyman hasn't put a dime into the partnership in eight years," he said. "We started Wyman & Prentiss with my capital, Ken's know-how, and the little photo-engraving equipment that Ken owned. He was the master artisan, and I say that without reservation, while I was the capitalist and promoter. No, Ken didn't put much cash into the business. But as for tak-

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ing it out —" Prentiss coughed into a green plaid handkerchief.

"You and he ever fight about money?" Ritter asked.

"Well — I guess all partners do. Nothing serious, though. Last year, when the firm was in the red, we had a hassle over his drawing account." Prentiss coughed again.

"Mr. Wyman didn't impress me as living extravagantly," Dr. Coffee said. "His home is modest enough."

"Which home?" Prentiss said. Then, apologetically, he said, "There I go again, slandering the dead. But I thought everybody knew. After all, when a man gets into big-money trouble, it's usually either gambling or women. Ken Wyman didn't gamble."

"Did Mrs. Wyman know?" Ritter asked.

Prentiss pursed his lips. "I don't think Helen was particularly happy at home," he said. "But you talked to her, Doctor. What's your impression? Did she tell you about the plane tickets?"

"No, she didn't."

"Well, there's no reason why she should, really. But she phoned me the other day — Monday, I think it was — to ask me to do her a favor when I went to New York with her husband. Well, Ken hadn't tipped me off, so I put my foot in it. I said I didn't know Ken was going to New York. So she started crying a little on the phone, and asked me not to say anything to Ken about her calling. Seems like the night before, while her husband was undressing for bed, he dropped his wallet and two airline tickets fell out. She asked him where he was going, and he said he was flying to New York with me on business. After I messed up the deal, she knew he was lying, and I guess she thought he might be running out on her."

"Do you know a man named Ray Bowes?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Ray? Sure. He's sort of staff photographer for the firm."

"He seems quite friendly with Mrs. Wyman," the pathologist said.

"Oh, Ray's been carrying the torch for Helen for years, ever since they were in school together. He gets sore when you kid him about it. Purely platonic, he says." Prentiss raised his handkerchief to hide a smirk.

There was a chilly silence.

"Well," Prentiss said, "if there's anything I can do to help —"

"Thank you for dropping in, Mr. Prentiss," Dr. Coffee said. "But I've only completed the gross autopsy. I'll let you know if the microscopic turns up anything. Good night."

Dr. Coffee listened to the footsteps retreating down the corridor of the surgical wing. When he heard the elevator doors open and close, he called, "Dr. Mookerji!"

The round, brown face of the Hindu appeared in the doorway.

"Doctor, what the devil did we do with the late Mr. Wyman's worldly belongings?"

Dr. Mookerji wagged his turban twice to the left. "Double-breasted imported tweed suit, plus silk shirt,

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underwear, and Cordovan footwear now reposing in mothproof bag on workbench in rear. Personal effects are contained in Manila envelope in lower right-handed drawer."

"Yes, of course." Dr. Coffee pulled out the bottom drawer of his desk and withdrew a large envelope, which he emptied on the desk.

From the tangle of watch chain, watch, small change, comb, handkerchief, fountain pen, lighter, and nail file, Ritter and Dr. Coffee reached for the wallet in unison. Ritter won.

"Guess we both got the same idea," the detective said. He checked through the wallet and drew out a green strip of paper. "Flight X-188 to San Francisco, 11 P.M., Wednesday. Why is there only one ticket?"

"That's not a question for a pathologist, Max."

"Okay, it's mine. And there's something else funny." Ritter was sifting the articles on the desk. "Notice anything, Doc?"

"What, Max?"

"No keys. Wouldn't a guy like Wyman carry a key ring?"

"I'd say so. Shall we call on Mrs. Wyman tonight?"

"Let's wait and break the news after they finish planting Wyman tomorrow. I love to go to burials when the mourners don't know I'm watching."

A chilling drizzle clouded the windshield when Dr. Coffee climbed into the police car the next morning.

"I got a few choice nuggets of information," Ritter said, as he put the car in gear. "I been busy. While everybody was paying next-to-last respects to the corpse down at the mortician's, I took a quiet look around the Wyman hacienda. The Widow Wyman was lying to you when she said her husband went out for cigars Wednesday night. I found a box of Perfectos in his desk drawer, half full."

"Maybe Wyman was lying, Max."

"Maybe. Anyhow, I also went out to the airport to check on the no-shows on Flight X-188 to San Francisco Wednesday night. Seems there were two — a Mr. and Mrs. Charles Farmer. Only Mrs. Farmer really checked in. She gave up the business end of her ticket for a gate pass and went aboard. Just before they closed the doors, she got off again, carrying her overnight bag. The stewardess on that flight ain't due back for a day or two, so I'm sort of marking time."

"That would explain the discrepancy between the two tickets Mrs. Wyman saw, and the one we found in Wyman's wallet."

"Maybe," the detective said. "I also called on a few of my financial connections this morning. Wyman didn't bank that $24,000 from the policy loan. His balance is $62.50. And he didn't put it in the business, either. No big deposits like that to the firm's account for the last two months. So where is it?"

"I don't know, Max," Dr. Coffee said, "but here *we* are."

Gray rain veiled the cemetery, blurring the outlines of tombstones

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and the dark silhouettes of gaunt cypresses. Dr. Coffee studied the faces of the mourners huddled at the graveside. Helen Wyman still appeared more winsome than wet-eyed. She stood between granite-faced Joe Prentiss and pink-cheeked Ray Bowes. She was looking neither at the pastor nor at the grave. Whatever she was staring at seemed to upset her more than the funeral service. Her face was tense; her mouth was set in a tight, hostile line.

Dr. Coffee followed the direction of her stare to a group of typographers, engravers, and office girls. Only one of the group seemed conspicuous enough to be the object of Helen Wyman's attention: a violet-eyed little brunette who might have just stepped from a Wyman & Prentiss calendar. She had been crying, and she dabbed at her eyes with a square of fine linen.

Dr. Coffee turned for another look at Helen Wyman, trying to analyze her taut expression. Could it be hate?

The minister droned, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in certain hope of the Resurrection . . ."

At last Helen Wyman sobbed. Prentiss gave her a comforting pat on the arm. She turned her back to him and buried her face against the ample shoulder of Ray Bowes. The photographer flushed and made an embarrassed gesture which tried to be protective without seeming too affectionate.

Prentiss came over to Dr. Coffee. "Any developments, Doctor?"

"I may know something this afternoon," the pathologist answered.

"Who's the good-looking brunette?" Ritter asked.

"You mean Gladys Channing?" Prentiss peered into the mist. "Yes, that's Gladys. She was Ken Wyman's secretary."

"Looks to me like a calendar girl," the detective said.

"Gladys used to pose for us," Prentiss said. "Very attractive model, in fact."

Ritter took Dr. Coffee's arm and walked him away rapidly. "I got a hunch we can crack the extra ticket mystery without the stewardess of X-188. Did you catch that babe's little feet, Doc?"

As Dr. Coffee entered his laboratory and shook out his raincoat, Dr. Mookerji looked up from his microscope and beamed.

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," the Hindu said.

"Good morning, Dr. Mookerji. How's your analysis coming?"

Dr. Mookerji's pink turban quivered as he wagged his big head. "Regretfully report only retrograde progress," he said. "Foreign substances present in scalp wound in such minute quantities that cannot devise analytical technique without exhausting suspected material."

Dan Coffee scratched his long chin. He said, "I'll send the specimen over to Northbank University this afternoon and let their spectrologists have a whirl at it."

"Am somewhat nonplused by seem-

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ing importance of scalp wound," Dr. Mookerji said, "inasmuch as late deceased did not expire from same."

"Simple," the pathologist explained. "The coroner says Wyman hit his head against the curb. If we find sand and cement traces in the wound, the coroner is right — which is highly unlikely. I think Wyman was deliberately conked by the person or persons who killed him. Lieutenant Ritter thinks he was conked hard enough so that even a woman with pointed shoes or high heels could have kicked him into eternity."

"Is Leftenant Ritter suspecting Widow Wyman of homicidal tendencies toward late husband?"

"The lieutenant is an honor graduate of the *cherchez-la-femme* school. Anyhow, our job is to find in the wound itself some clue as to the weapon that made it. For instance, if we find flakes of enamel from a photographer's tripod, or leather rubbings from a lady's handbag —"

"Comprehension is now dawning," said Dr. Mookerji.

Two hours later, Ray Bowes and Helen Wyman burst into the lab. Bowes, running interference, charged through the broken field of startled technicians, dodged around Dr. Mookerji, and burst panting into Dr. Coffee's private office. His ruddy face was damp with perspiration, and the angry gestures of his small, plump hands were awkward. But for all his rumpled aspect, he was a knight in shining irony.

"Mrs. Wyman just heard the news from the insurance company," he said, "so we came by to congratulate you."

"I was glad to help," Dr. Coffee said.

"Help? Quit kidding, Doctor. The company isn't paying a dime, because you reported that Wyman was murdered. They say if the murderer turns out to be the beneficiary, the policy is void."

"I hadn't thought of that," Dr. Coffee said. "Please sit down."

"So you can think up some new tricks?" Bowes shouted. "Helen just wanted to let you know she regrets listening to you and —"

"Oh, stop it, Ray!" Helen Wyman broke in. Her black veil fluttered prettily as she sat down. "I do thank you for your services, Doctor, no matter how shocking the result. May I be of help?"

"The police will be handling the investigation, but I know of one question Lieutenant Ritter will ask when you meet him. It seems you saw two air-line tickets in your husband's wallet the other night. There was only one when he was found. Have you any idea whom the other might have been intended for?"

Helen Wyman looked at Bowes, whose nostrils quivered, rabbit-fashion. "No," she said.

"Look over the latest Wyman & Prentiss calendars," Bowes added.

"Could it have been a young woman named Gladys Channing?"

Again Helen Wyman looked at

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Bowes. His expression was blank. She said nothing.

"You might ask Joe Prentiss about that," Bowes said. "Joe's been drooling around Gladys for months."

"My husband always considered her quite attractive," Mrs. Wyman said.

"Did your husband and Mr. Prentiss quarrel over Gladys?"

"I — I don't know what to think." The widow covered her face with her black-gloved hands. Bowes put his arm around her. She stood up and started for the door.

Max Ritter telephoned as Dan Coffee was getting ready for bed that night: "Put your pants back on, Doc. We're calling on Gladys Channing. I want another look at her feet. I'll pick you up in twenty minutes."

On the way to Miss Channing's apartment house, Ritter explained that he had called the San Francisco police as soon as he learned that "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Farmer" had expected to fly west on the night Wyman was killed. He had just had a long and detailed reply.

"Seems like a few weeks ago somebody opened two bank accounts in San Francisco under the name of Charles Farmer. By a funny coincidence, the total balance comes to just $24,000, same as Wyman's insurance loan. Farmer also gave the banks as reference when he rented a plushy apartment on Nob Hill, so the boys dropped in after I called. They found the apartment's never been lived in, but the closets are busting with expensive clothes, male and female, including a cute little mink jacket and enough shoes for a couple of centipedes. They also found 100,000 bucks in travelers' checks with no signature, not even Farmer's, locked in the bureau drawer. So I think we should call on Gladys."

Gladys was not exactly pleased by their visit. She tried hard to give the impression that she had been waked out of a sound sleep. She yawned as she poked her well-coiffed head through a gap in the door.

"Look," Ritter said, "we know you got constitutional rights and you don't have to let us in without a warrant. But I'd like to ask you four — five questions. Can we come in?"

Gladys Channing's violet eyes made a quick appraisal. "Please do," she said. "I've got nothing to hide."

"The stewardess on that San Francisco flight Wednesday is due back in Northbank tonight," Ritter said, as he sat down. "Shall I bring her here?"

Gladys hardly batted an eye. "What for?" she asked.

"To save you a trip to the airport. Maybe she'll identify you as the Mrs. Charles Farmer who jumped ship just before the take-off."

"So what?" Gladys crossed her legs.

"So why were you going west with the late K. Wyman?"

"That's easy. He was taking his secretary on a short business trip."

"I been in touch with San Francisco," Ritter said. "You and Wyman

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weren't taking no short business trip. Wyman was going for good. And so were you."

"I got on that plane with just an overnight bag," Gladys said. "A girl don't usually start a new life with just an overnight bag."

"She might," the detective said, looking at the girl's tiny, purple-feathered mules, "if she knew there was a cozy little nest lined with fine feathers at the other end of the flight. Feathers like a size-fourteen mink jacket, for instance."

"There must be 14,000,000 size-fourteen girls in this country, by the last census," Gladys said.

"Could be. But there ain't 14,000,000 Cinderellas who could squeeze their tootsies into a three-and-a-half shoe. You got a very damned pretty little foot."

Gladys paled. She breathed deeply and audibly for a moment.

"Okay," she said, finally, "what do you want from me?"

"Why did you get off the plane?"

"Ken didn't show up. Was I going out there all alone?"

"You knew he was dead, didn't you?"

"Oh my God, no! I — I was furious. I thought he stood me up, that's all."

"You knew Joe Prentiss would do anything to keep you from running off with Wyman — that he'd even kill the guy."

"Aw now, how stupid can a man get — even a cop? Joe Prentiss wouldn't kill a fly to keep me here because he knows it wouldn't do him any good. Oh, sure, he's been making passes at me for months, but he knows I loved Ken Wyman."

"It don't make sense. Prentiss is single. Wyman was married."

"My hard luck," Gladys said. "I wouldn't go for Joe Prentiss if he was the last millionaire on earth, tax free."

No, Gladys didn't know of any enemies Wyman had. No, she didn't know any trouble he was in. No, he'd had no visits from strangers — unless you counted that FBI man, who really came to see Prentiss, only Prentiss was home with the flu, so he'd talked to Wyman. She thought his name was Tufts.

"He was investigating paper and inks made by certain manufacturers," Gladys said. "He looked around the shop and took samples of our work. He hasn't been back since."

"Did Ray Bowes ever make passes at you?"

"Ray?" Gladys laughed. "Ray never made passes at anybody. He just makes calf-eyes at Helen Wyman. Any more questions, Big Boy?"

"Thank you, no. But stick around. People are going to be watching the airport and places like that. Good night."

Two days later, Dr. Coffee got his spectrographic analysis report from Northbank University. He sat at his desk, poring over the strips of photographic paper on which unevenly spaced lines made long, dark ladders. Light from the incandescent vapor

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arising, from heating a tiny fragment of Wyman's scalp wound in an electric arc had produced a different pattern from that made by vaporizing a fragment from another part of the scalp. Heavy lines on the graph indicated that particles of copper, carbon, and manganese were present in the wound. There were also indications of some complex organic oil which would be difficult to break down without long, intricate computations and measurements of wave lengths in millionths of a millimeter.

"I think," the pathologist said to Dr. Mookerji, who was looking over his shoulder, "that I shall be very unscientific and make a long guess that the oil is linseed oil."

"On what basis are you deducing character of seeds?" the Hindu asked.

"A report from San Francisco, for one thing," Dr. Coffee said. "And on the presence of carbon and manganese. The drying qualities of linseed oil are increased when it's boiled with manganese oxide. Boiled linseed oil plus carbon blacks equals printer's ink. Wyman was in the printing business. Therefore — Great stars! I think I've got something, Doctor."

He snatched up the telephone to call Lieutenant Ritter. "Max, have you stopped looking for Wyman's brief-case?"

"No, I still got a man on it, Doc. He's getting nowhere."

"Can you get five or ten more, Max, to canvass every checkroom and checking locker in town? I got a hunch they'll find something. The picture is beginning to clear up, Max."

After he had hung up, Dr. Coffee drummed on the desk top for a moment. Then he took the telephone directory and looked up the number of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

When Max Ritter telephoned, Dr. Coffee was halfway through dinner. "We found it, Doc! The brief-case. In a checking locker at the airport. It weighs a ton."

"I should think it would, Max. Besides a toothbrush, razor, and other toilet articles, I'll bet it's full of flat copper plates."

"Doc, you should of been a detective. How — ?"

"Put the brief-case back in the same locker, Max. Leave a man there, but tell him not to stop anybody taking it out. Where's Helen Wyman?"

"Home. She hasn't left the house for two days."

"Good. Now listen. I want you to round up Mrs. Wyman, Ray Bowes, Joe Prentiss, and Gladys Channing. Have them all brought to the police station right away. Use any pretext you want — to sign statements, or anything. When you get them all together, give them a group lecture on the evils of obstructing justice and all that sort of thing. Then announce that you're going to hold Mrs. Wyman overnight. Say that an FBI man named Tufts is coming in from Washington on the midnight plane.

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Is there a midnight plane from Washington, Max?"

"There's one at 12:40."

"Good enough. Then announce that this FBI man wants to question Mrs. Wyman on the whereabouts and contents of a brief-case that disappeared on the night Wyman was murdered. Say you've been asked to keep Mrs. Wyman in custody until he arrives. Got all that straight, Max? . . . Good. After that, you turn the other three loose. Once they're out of sight, jump on your white horse and meet me at the Wyman house. I assume you have a key."

"To the back door," the detective said.

"Fine. At the back door, then. And don't leave your car around."

It was nearly two hours before Ritter joined the pathologist.

"What gives, Doc?" The detective unlocked the back door. "You've been holding out on me. What are we looking for in here?"

"We're not looking, Max. We're waiting — in the dark."

"Who do we expect?"

"The murderer. If I'm wrong, you can sue me. I got the hunch when I saw the spectro-analysis of Wyman's scalp wound today. The graphs indicated that Wyman was slugged with a copper object containing traces of printer's ink —"

"So he was killed in the print shop?" Ritter asked.

"Not necessarily. But I happened to think of those unsigned travelers' checks in 'Mr. Farmer's' San Francisco apartment. It struck me that unsigned checks in that amount must be either stolen or counterfeit. The FBI interest in the W. & P. print shop spells counterfeiting. I checked with the FBI. There are bum travelers' checks in interstate circulation, all right.

"Now, if the checks were printed here, the plates they were made from wouldn't be left lying around the print shop, where they might excite the curiosity of an honest journeyman printer. Since Wyman was the skilled artisan of the partnership, it's logical that he should have custody of the plates — Hurt yourself, Max?"

The detective had bumped into a chair in the dark and was muttering profanely.

"We'll wait here in the living room," Dr. Coffee went on. "As you pointed out the other day, the murderer has Wyman's keys. So sit over here, where you can train your artillery on the front door. As I was saying, Wyman was probably custodian of the plates. Let's say he kept them in his brief-case when they were not in use. Let's say that when the FBI man dropped in, Wyman knew the game was up, flew to San Francisco to establish a new identity and lay the basis for a new life, then came back to cover up his traces. Let's say that on the night he was due to skip, he decided to leave the damning evidence behind, pointing to somebody else. So before boarding his plane, he took his brief-case —"

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Dr. Coffee stopped abruptly. He heard footsteps on the walk — and a faint click as Ritter moved the safety catch of his gun. The footfall grew more distinct, climbing the front steps. A key grated in the lock. The door opened slowly and closed quickly. The footsteps crossed the foyer to the living room. A cone of light leaped through the darkness from Ritter's flashlight.

"Drop that brief-case," Ritter ordered, "and lift those lily-white paws, Prentiss!"

Joe Prentiss recoiled from the glare. He obeyed.

Dr. Coffee switched on the ceiling lights.

"Look for the plates, Doc. I'll look for knives and guns."

The detective searched Prentiss. Dr. Coffee opened the brief-case. A stack of copper plates slid out. Cross-hatched lines and etched shadows made dark oblongs on the gleaming metal.

"I — when you mentioned Wyman's brief-case tonight, Lieutenant," Prentiss stammered, "I remembered seeing it under his desk in the shop. So I — I brought it over."

"You didn't get that from Wyman's desk, Prentiss. You got it from Locker 669 at the airport. And don't forget it's been there long enough for us to develop your prints off the copper, test the edges for bloodstains, and put it back again."

"But — but why in the world would I — ?"

"You tell him, Doc. You were just getting to that part."

"As I was saying," Dr. Coffee resumed, "Wyman decided to leave the incriminating evidence pointing to someone else. Since Prentiss was away the day the FBI called, why not leave the plates in his desk? But Prentiss knew his partner was up to some sly tricks, because Mrs. Wyman had phoned about the air tickets. So Prentiss was waiting.

"I assume, Mr. Prentiss, that you grabbed the plates out of Wyman's hands as he was preparing to plant them, that you banged him on the head with them, and, as he fell, that you jumped on him repeatedly or kicked him to death. Then you loaded the body in your car and abandoned it in an alley. Your taking his keys puzzled me for a while — until I decided you were planning to reverse Wyman's trick and carry the plates back to his own home whenever you could do it unobserved."

Deathly pale, Prentiss collapsed into a chair. "I — he was going to leave me holding the bag!" he mumbled.

"You fooled him after all," Ritter said.

"You won't have to face that counterfeiting charge. Homicide gets priority in this state. Stick your hands in these, Buster."

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In his mystery novels Cornell Woolrich-William Irish deliberately subordinates every facet of technique to what he calls "the line of suspense," and few critics would deny that at the top of his form Woolrich-Irish can distill more terror, more excitement, more downright nail-biting suspense out of even the most commonplace happenings than nearly all his colleagues-and-competitors-in-crime. The simple truth is, the sheer narrative power of the best Woolrich-Irish writing carries his readers on the crest of a 'tec tidal wave, equally oblivious to the long arm of coincidence and the long arm of incredibility. There might be a hole in one of the Woolrich-Irish stories big enough to drive a 10-ton truck through, but it wouldn't stop, or even detour, the average reader: a topdrawer Woolrich-Irish thriller is usually a one-way reading ticket, with no time out from first page to last.

But Woolrich-Irish has many strings to his bow; or to put it another way, he can play the same basic theme with startling variations. Here, for example, is an atypical Woolrich yarn — but we doubt if your enjoyment will be one whit less, and we doubt if, once you've started, you'll be able to stop short of the very last word . . .

CINDERELLA AND THE MOB

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE WHOLE FAMILY JUMPED ON ME at once. You'd think I was a mere child or something, instead of sixteen. You'd think a person would have some rights on a Thursday evening. You'd think school work was the most important thing in the world.

You'd think — well anyway, you'd *think!*

Father said: "Not with that sore throat you've got, young lady! We'll tell you all about the picture when we come home."

Mother said: "And even if she didn't have a sore throat she'd stay home tonight! She's got to study *some* of the time."

And of course Fran, my older sister, who wasn't going with them but was going out with her this-month's beau, had to put her two cents' worth in too. "When I was your age—" she started to say.

"Oh, sure," I sighed wearily, "back in those Roman times things were different."

But it didn't do a bit of good. They all got ready and they all went out,

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and there I was stuck with a lot of books again. The last thing I got told was, "Now remember, I expect to find you in bed when we come home. None of this running over to Betty Lou's house!"

The front door went *bang!* and I was Cinderella again.

I gritted my teeth and opened my history book, but I couldn't see a thing in it for a long time, just waves of red. "Isn't something exciting or glam'rous ever going to happen to me?" I seethed. "Do I have to be about twenty, and all bent over and rheumatic, before I even begin to live at all?"

And then, like it was just waiting for that much encouragement, the phone started to ring. I knew it was probably Fran's boy-friend calling to find out what was keeping her so long; she was the only one who ever got phone calls in our family.

First, I wasn't going to bother about it — let him ring — but it kept on until it got annoying, so I went out to it.

"Hello," I croaked, and between what the sore throat had done to my voice and what the family had done to my disposition, I must have sounded like someone sawing wood.

It was a man's voice, but it wasn't Fran's boy-friend. He sounded sort of — I don't know how to put it — confidential, as if he was talking out of one corner of his mouth and didn't want anyone but me to hear him. He said, "Hello, is this Chicago Rose?"

For a minute I was so surprised I just blinked, and then before I had a chance to tell him I wasn't, he rushed ahead, as if he was afraid I was going to hang up before he got through saying what he had to.

"Listen, you don't know me, Rose," he said, "but it's all right; Eddie gave me your number. You know, Eddie Dubois back in Chi. He wrote it down for me before I came away; I mislaid it just now, but it didn't matter; I had it memorized anyway. He told me you'd sound just like you do, like you just had your tonsils taken out."

I'd kept trying to tell him, through the whole thing, that he must have the wrong number, but he was talking so fast I couldn't even get one good-sized word in.

And then it started to sound intriguing, so I changed my mind. I looked at it this way: every added five minutes I spent at the phone meant that much less time I'd have to spend over those poisonous books afterward, so what did I have to lose?

He said: "There's a bunch of us just in and we got a little job for you. Your kind of job, y'know, Rose? The kind of stuff that made you famous in Chicago."

"Oh," I said. Which is a pretty safe word.

"You'll get a cut," he went on, like he was trying to coax me.

He didn't say where, but I looked at my arms apprehensively; who likes to have to wear court-plaster? "Well, if it's all the same to you —" I started to say.

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"Oh, I see, cash on the line ahead of time. Well, we'll do it your way then, Rose." Then he asked, "Are you warm right now?"

I felt my forehead. There *was* a good deal of heat coming up, Father had shaken up the furnace before he went out. "A little," I said, "but not enough to bother me."

"As long as you're not red-hot it's okay. Now listen, Rose, I can't give it to you over the phone, naturally. How's about coming out to your place?"

I looked around me and I rolled my eyes to myself. I could just imagine *their* faces if they came home and found —

"No," I said quickly, "I don't think you better do that." Was I having fun by now! This had the dates of the English kings beat all hollow.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Ain't you paying protection these days? Well, all right, make it anywhere you say, Rose."

I'd never met anyone at all until now, except Betty Lou, and I always met her in Gilman's drugstore down on our corner, right by the soda fountain. I couldn't make it there, because that fresh Willie Smith who tends the fountain knew me awfully well, and besides I owed him thirty cents for back sodas and he might humiliate me by asking for it.

"*You* name the place," I said.

"I'll park on Main and Center," he said. "How'll that be? Northwest corner; you can't miss me."

That was all the way downtown, and it kind of scared me for a minute; if they ever found out that I went that far downtown at this hour, I'd never hear the end of it. Even in the daytime that was out of bounds.

But I remembered I didn't really have to go; I could just tell him I would and then never show up, so it didn't matter. "All right," I said.

"I'll tell you how you'll know me," he said. "I'm wearing a very light lid, almost the lightest in town. I'll keep turning it around in my hands, like I was looking at the band."

"Well, uh, did —" I kept trying to remember that name he'd used at the beginning, and couldn't. "Did he tell you what I look like?"

"Eddie Dubois? Naw, only that you're red-headed and an eyeful."

I glanced in the hall-mirror next to me, covered up a snicker with my hand. "Well, I changed that a couple weeks ago. I'm blonde now."

He didn't seem surprised to hear that, as if all the girls he knew were always doing that to their hair. "Oh, sure, I know how it is. You just gimme the business, I'll know you."

I could tell he was getting ready to leave the phone, and I knew I ought to tell him that I wasn't Chicago Rose, that he'd been speaking to the wrong party the whole time; but I didn't have the nerve any more, after waiting this long.

The last thing he said was, "Make it as soon as you can, huh, Rose; don't keep me waiting there on the open corner too long, it's not healthy." Then he rang off.

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I hung up with a sigh. It had been the most interesting conversation I'd ever had, and I hated it to be over. Now I'd have to go back to those bum books waiting there all over the dining-room table.

I sighed again. I was wishing I really was Chicago Rose; I bet she didn't have to study civics and go to bed at eleven on week-nights.

Then I thought: I *could* be if I wanted to, just for a few minutes. He doesn't even know what she looks like himself. Or I could just go down there and take a peek at him from around the corner and then come straight back again. And that way, my study time would be all used up and it would be too late to bother with these books any more tonight.

And before I knew it I was upstairs in Fran's room, looking her things over.

I took down one of her old evening dresses and put it on. It didn't fit so good, so I pinned it tight behind me and that made it fit better. But my face looked too babyish sticking up out of it. So then I opened the bureau drawer and found a black crayon I'd watched her use sometimes and made rings around my eyes.

That helped a little, and then I spread on all the powder and rouge she had there, until hardly any real skin showed through anywhere.

When I got through it didn't look so awfully good maybe, but at least it didn't look like me any more.

I found a pair of her shoes and put them on too, because my own all had low heels. We both wore about the same size. They kind of threw me forward, like standing on stilts, until I got the hang of them.

Up to now I'd been just sort of play-acting. You know, like you do when you're twelve, dress up in grown-up clothes and make believe you're going somewhere. I didn't really think I'd have the nerve to go.

But as long as I was all rigged up like that, it seemed a shame not to go down there and take a peek at him just for fun. Then I could tell Betty Lou all about it tomorrow in class, and we'd have a lot of fun over it.

I knew I'd be back long before they came home from the movie at half-past eleven — I'd have to be — but just to be on the safe side, in case Fran had a fight with her boy-friend and came home early, like sometimes happened, I put a laundry bag full of old clothes under the bedcovers to make it look like it was me lying there all cuddled up. With the light out you couldn't tell the difference.

Then I went downstairs. I fell down the last three or four because I wasn't so steady on those extra-high heels yet, but what was a little thing like that? I just got right up again and straightened myself out.

I put out all the lights and then I watched carefully from the front door, to make sure none of the neighbors were at their windows or out on the sidewalk just then, to see me come out.

As soon as I was sure the coast was clear, I ducked out. I had my own

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key, that I used in the daytime to let myself in when I came home from school, so I wasn't worried about getting in again.

I walked fast until I got away from our house, and then I slowed down a little, so as not to attract attention.

What made me get in the cab was an accident. I mean, I made the first block all right without meeting anybody, and then this cab showed up and started trailing along next to me, on account of how swell I was dressed, I guess.

"Cab, lady?" the driver said. That gave me a thrill; it was the first time anyone had ever called me "lady." But of course I didn't need a cab; it was only thirty blocks from our house down to where he'd said he'd be, and that's not much of a walk. So I just shook my head politely.

Then the very next minute Mr. and Mrs. Jurgens, who lived right next door to us, turned the corner not ten yards ahead and started to come straight toward me. There was no chance to get out of their way. Luckily the cab was still there, right next to me. I gave kind of a sideways jump, and before I knew it I was in it.

The Jurgenses went right by without even looking at me, but before I could get out again, the cab had picked up speed and was on its way, so there didn't seem to be anything to do but go ahead and tell the driver where I was going.

He kind of looked up sharp when he heard how scrapey my voice was, and then I saw him squinting at all the make-up on my face, in the rear-sight mirror. After a while he asked, kind of friendly and understanding, "How's business, sister?"

I didn't know much about business, only what I heard my father say, so I repeated an expression I'd heard him use to my mother lots of times.

"It's been so long since I made a sale," I said solemnly, "that I might just as well give my stock away to the Salvation Army!"

He looked kind of surprised at such a thought, but he shook his head sympathetically.

When we got near Main and Center I said, "Stop in the middle of the block, before you get all the way to the corner." I figured that way I could edge up to it and peek around it without him seeing me.

When he did, I got out and said cordially, "Well, thanks ever so much, it was awful nice of you to bring me all the way down here."

He said, "Wa-a-ait a minute, what is this?" And he started to climb out after me real slow.

I didn't like the look on his face, so I started to back away little by little. Then when I saw him spit on his hands and rub them together, I turned and started going real fast.

But I made the mistake of looking back over my shoulder the whole time, and that way I forgot to watch where I was going. He took a jump and started sliding after me, like on an ice-pond. I gave a squeak and turned away too late.

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My whole face went *spiff* into somebody's chest. It was hard, too, like a barrel; I nearly saw stars for a minute.

I got around behind him, hung onto him, and said: "Make him go 'way! I didn't ask him to ride in his cab, he asked *me* if I wanted to."

By the time I saw him stoop over to pick up a very light ice-cream-color hat he'd dropped, it was too late. He said, "I guess you're Rose, by that voice alone."

Then he laughed and said, "Same old Rose. Eddie told me about that trick of yours of getting out of cabs before they stop, and then when the drivers turn around to collect the fare they find the back seat empty. Only you seem to have gone sort of kittenish with it."

He shoved a bill at the driver and growled: "Gedouda here before I wrap the crankshaft around your neck!"

What a growl that was! Like a sea-lion in the zoo.

Then before I knew what was happening, he had me by the arm and I was all the way over at a big black sedan waiting at the opposite curb. "Come on, Rose, I'll take you around to meet the boys."

"Y-you been waiting long?" I quavered. The only reason that kept it from sounding as frightened as it was, was how inflamed my vocal cords were, I guess.

"Plenty #&!c# long!" he said. I'd heard two of the words before, but the other one was brand-new. Something told me this wasn't a very good time to tell him I wasn't Rose, that maybe I better put it off a little while, until a better opportunity came.

There were two other men in the sedan, one at the wheel, one in back. He introduced me, but only after we were already under way and I was firmly wedged on the back seat between him and one of the two others.

"Here she is, boys. Trigger, this is Rose. Rose, meet Oh-Johnny."

It seemed a worse time than ever to bring up about not being Rose. But compared to what it was going to be like later, if I'd only known it, it was practically ideal.

I said, "I don't even know *your* name yet," to my original acquaintance. There didn't seem to be any harm in that.

"I'm Blitz Burley," he said, like he was supposed to be famous or something.

They seemed to do their best to be agreeable to me, as if I was someone who might be valuable to them later on. The one called Trigger said, trying to make polite small-talk, "I b'lieve a moll I used to go around with knew your older sister in the Women's Reformatory at . . ."

And the one next to me asked considerately: "Does my shoulder-sling bother you the way we're sitting? I'll move it out of the way if it does."

"Huh," Blitz said scornfully before I could answer, "she probably curls her hair with a repeater every night, don'tcha Rose?"

I didn't exactly know what they were talking about, but the sensible

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thing to say seemed to be: "I used to but I found out I wasn't getting the best results that way." So I said it.

By this time we'd got to where they were bringing me, so we all got out. There was one pressed close on each side of me, and the one called Oh-Johnny was right in back of me. I don't think they meant anything by it, they were just being sociable, but the only place I could have got to by breaking away suddenly from them and running would have been where we were going anyway, so there didn't seem to be much sense to that.

It was some kind of a hotel, but it wasn't a very presentable or tidy one. They went in the side way so they wouldn't have to pass anyone, and up to a door on the third floor. It had an elevator, but they walked up.

Blitz knocked, in a funny way. Two quick ones and two slow ones. The door opened in a funny way too. First, just a ribbon of orange showed, as if someone was looking out with just one half of one eye. Then it opened all the way, and we went in one behind the other.

Trigger was going to go first, but Blitz, who had very good manners, knocked him out of the way with his elbow and said, "Ladies first."

"Why?" Trigger asked.

"I dunno; I suppose so if there's a rod waiting behind it they get it first and you got time to draw."

There was another man on the inside of the door just finishing putting something away; I guess it was a handkerchief in his back pocket. There were also two more men in the room, playing cards at a table. I was now surrounded by six of them.

I still thought it could wait a little longer, to tell them I wasn't Rose but just Penny Richards of Thomas Jefferson High School. Maybe till I got outside again, for instance.

There was a clock staring me in the face across the room, and it was already twenty after ten by now. I had less than an hour left, if I wanted to get back home before the family came in from the movies.

And to make matters worse, I'd lost track of just where we were, they'd driven in such a confusing, roundabout way coming over; I didn't know how long it would take me to get back from here.

I kind of stood there in the middle of them and they all sized me up. This was the first time they'd got a good look at me under a real bright light, even Blitz. He slapped his side and said: "I gotta hand it to you dames, I don't know how you do it these days! If I didn't know better, I could eat my hat you were only a twenty-year-old chicken just breaking in."

"Yeah," another one nodded. "Wudje do, Rose, have the old muzzle lifted on you?"

But they didn't waste any more time over that. They all pulled up chairs and kind of moved in close around me, like they were going to have a conference. Blitz said, "Okay, have a drink, Rose, while we're giving this to you."

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First, I said yes, because a nice cherry phosphate or something would have gone good right then; all that sticky lip stuff of Fran's had made me feel parched. But what he handed me was tan and tasted like gasoline sprinkled with red pepper. When I got what was left of my blistered tongue safely back inside again I said no, I'd changed my mind, and handed it back.

"She's right," somebody spoke up. "Not when she's on a job."

"All right, now here it is, Rose," Blitz said, sitting down and hitching up his trousers at the knees. "We got a guy all nicely fingered-up for rubbing."

I shook my head hopelessly to myself, without letting them see me, before he even went any further. Out of that whole sentence he'd just given me, I only knew what the first four words meant.

I suppose I would have known more about it if I'd followed some kinds of movies more closely — they reminded me a lot of some people I'd once seen in a movie — but the kind I went to mostly were love pictures, where they didn't talk that way at all.

"He come here from Chicago, and we come here after him," he went on. "He don't know we're here yet, and he thinks he's pulled a curtain down after him. But even so, he's cagey, he's wise as they come. We can't get him out in the right spot where we can get at him easy. And then there's another reason why we ain't dropped him yet."

I knew what that word meant, at least. It's when you stop associating with somebody, snub them. Like when I dropped a girl last year in my French class because she always laughed every time I got up to recite.

"Now, he's gettin' it because he lammed out with the whole haul instead of splitting the way the agreement was. I was doing a little time right then, and a couple of the other boys had a little heat on them, and I guess he thought it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

"Well, he'll find out his mistake. But that don't do us no good, see Rose? First we gotta find out what he did with the haul. If we don't, once we dust him off, we can kiss it goodbye, we'll never see it again. That's where you come in."

What good is it when a person keeps talking and you don't even know what they're saying? I had the hardest time not yawning in their faces; I only kept from it by closing my mouth tight and pushing the yawn back, because I knew it would be bad manners. I'd been scolded enough at home for doing that.

The whole thing wasn't even particularly glamorous, just sort of over a person's head, like some things in civics. I was beginning to wish I hadn't come. It hadn't turned out to be as much fun as I thought it would be.

"Now he's a pushover for a dame. Always has been. But she's got to be his kind of dame, not just any dame at all. Machine-gun slugs can't drag a

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word out of him. But give him his head with a dame and he'll start talking. If she's the right kind of a dame, and he has confidence in her.

"The only thing which has saved him so far is that he goes for a peculiar, sweet, milk-fed type which has gone completely out of circulation; you can't find 'em any more. Enough of 'em have tried to be that way with him, but it don't go over; he can spot a fake a mile away.

"So you can see this ain't going to be an easy job, Rose. He's no fool. The minute a girl acts like she's too wise, he starts putting up his guard. And in a case like this, if he ever tumbles we primed you for this, it'll be curtains for you!"

I couldn't see much inducement in that. What'd I need curtains for anyway? We had plenty at home, on every window.

I looked at the clock. It was quarter to eleven now. I didn't see how I was going to do it, and still get home safely ahead of the family. "About how long will it take?" I asked doubtfully.

"That depends entirely on how good you are, Rose," Blitz said. "If he falls at all, he falls hard and right away — he's that kind of a guy. If he once gets his fur up and starts suspectin' you, you'll never get anywhere in a week."

I thought maybe I better just say I would do it, and then go straight home and not pay any more attention to them at all, once I was out of here. I hate arguments, and some of their faces looked kind of mean and ugly.

"All right," I sighed unenthusiastically.

"Now, we know where he's holed up, and we'll plant you where he can't miss you; we got everything worked out. The first thing you gotta do is find out what he done with that haul. Naturally, he ain't going to spill that easy, not even if he thinks you're his kind of a dame. So here's how you work it. There was some ice with it. Not much, it was mostly lettuce. But anyway, there was a little ice with it. The idea is, wherever the ice is, the dough ain't gonna be so far away.

"You tease him for some ice. If you've made a dent at all, he'll come across without thinking twice. That'll tell us what we want to know. He wouldn't bank it, accounta it's hot. It's a cinch it's around some place, not very far from him.

"Now the rest of it's simple. He'll wanta take you out. You see to it that he makes it the Jingle Club —" He stopped and grinned at me. "Djever hear of that before?"

"No," I said truthfully.

"No one else ever did either, before tonight. We're opening it specially for his benefit, just for this one night. It's a dummy, get it? Everything is all fixed, just waiting for you to show up there with him. The waiters, the couples dancing, even the guys playing in the band are all props, so don't be surprised when you see them start easing out one by one, leavin' you all by yourselves.

"It's your job to keep him from no-

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ticing what's going on around him. You won't be left uncovered, don't worry. Every knothole will be plugged up with lead. We're doing this thing right. Now have you got it all straight?"

Straight? It was a complete blur as far as I was concerned; as bad as one of Mr. Peabody's dry lectures on a spring day when you're not paying attention.

Just about four or five words out of the whole thing were floating around loose in my head, without any meaning. *Ice. Jingle Club. Rubbing. Curtains.* "Uh-huh," I said vaguely.

"Whether you wangle the location of the haul outta him before or after you get to the Jingle Club don't matter, just so long as you wangle it. You be the best judge of that yourself. Soft music and dim lights sometimes help to loosen a guy up too, y'know."

I perked up a little at that, for the first time. "Oh, is there going to be music and dancing there?"

"Yeah," he answered dryly. "First there'll be music and dancing, for a front. Then as soon as you get up from the table for a tip-off that you've got the goods on the haul, there'll just be music without the dancing."

They all sort of smiled at that. But what did I care? If there's one thing I'm crazy about — I started bouncing up and down on my chair. "Oo, I wish I was there already! I can hardly wait!"

He looked encouragingly at the others. "See? She's rehearsing already. Only, don't overdo it, Rose. You almost act too young, you almost act like you was on'y about sixteen. Don't let him spot you for a phoney or —"

I remembered that from the time before. "Curtains," I said placidly.

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a minute. "Babe, you got guts, all right."

They all started to shove their chairs back, like it was over. For my part I was glad; it hadn't been a bit interesting.

The last thing Blitz warned me was, "And for Pete's sake, Rose, when you do get up — to go back and powder your nose or whatever the stall is — stand good and clear of that table, or Heaven help you. It'll be wood one minute, Swiss cheese the next."

That was childish, talking that way; how can a table be wood one minute and cheese the next?

They were all kind of waiting, watching me. I didn't know what I was supposed to do next, so I didn't do anything, just sat on there without moving. A look of enlightenment crossed Blitz' face. "Oh, I get it!" he said, and reached in his pocket and took out a bunch of bills. Before I knew it, they were in my folded hands.

"What do I do with this?" I asked, puzzled.

"Okay, Rose, okay," he said soothingly, like he didn't want any argument and took out some more and added them to what I was holding already. "That ought to hold you. And you can keep whatever ice he gives you."

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Now I ask you, what good is keeping ice? In half an hour, all you've got is water.

They stood me up and looked me over, turning me around like a top. "Maybe she ought to scrape off a little of that plaster of Paris," one suggested. "She looks kind of weird, like a housepainter's assistant."

"Naw," Blitz interposed hurriedly, "if she takes any of that off, her real age'll probably show through. This way she's just about right; she'll get under his skin. She gives the impression, kind of, of a school kid trying to act grown up."

With that, they all started to get ready to go out. Only instead of straightening their coats around their necks, like most people do, they all started smoothing and patting them down under their arms, like they had on woollen underwear that scratches.

Blitz gave them their final orders. "Okay, boys. Now, Trigger and me are going over with her. The rest of you go to the Jingle and get in position. You all know your places.

"Al, you take the pantry doors. Biff, you're in the dummy phone booth, down out of sight. Oh-Johnny, you're behind the bar. Spike, you take it from above, through the ceiling; we got a sight-hole bored through. Me and Trigger'll seal up the front, once the stooges are out of the way.

"We're gonna have a truck outside dumping coal down a tin chute; you know how much noise *that* makes. There won't be a sound heard."

Meanwhile I was still clutching this bunch of bills in my hand. I thought it would be a good opportunity to get rid of it some place around the room while their attention was all taken up listening to him; I mayn't know lots of things, but I know enough not to take money from strangers.

I noticed a box with cigarettes in it on a table near the door, so I slipped it in there and closed the lid, when no one was watching.

But after they already had the door open, and half of them were already outside in the hall, the last one to leave must have reached into the box for a cigarette. He suddenly said: "Hey!" and stood there pointing down to the money.

They all moved so swiftly and so silently, like big cats, you could hardly follow them with your eyes. Before I knew it, I was back inside the doorway again, and they were all around me in a ring, squinting hard and holding their hands under their arms.

"Y'weren't going to double-iggy us, were you, Rose? Is that why you left this behind?" Blitz asked. His lips had turned sort of white.

I seemed to be the only person in the whole room who wasn't all excited and shaking. "I was going to come back for it later," I explained coolly. If they were going to get that worked-up about my refusing it, I supposed I'd have to pretend to accept it.

They all took deep breaths and kind of relaxed. "Oh," Blitz explained, relieved, "she don't want Brennan to catch her with that much dough on her while she's around him. That's all

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it is, fellas. He might smell a rat."

We all went down the stairs and out the side way again, me in the middle of the six of them. I kept thinking: "I've *got* to get away from them soon, I can't stay much longer; I'll just get in ahead of the family by the skin of my teeth as it is."

Anyway, I didn't like them much any more. The novelty had worn off. They were too quarrelsome and touchy, and I only understood about one word out of every three they said to me. I hadn't had a good time at all, the whole time I was up there with them.

Outside the hotel four of them left us, went down to another car standing waiting further down the dark street, and Blitz and myself and Trigger got in the first car.

I had made up my mind that the quickest and easiest way of getting away from them, instead of going into a lot of wrangling and explaining, was to let them take me over to this other man they'd been talking about all evening, whoever he was. It wouldn't take more than five or ten minutes longer, and that way I'd get rid of them, first of all.

Then instead of having two people to get away from, I'd only have one, and it would be a lot simpler. I hadn't pretended to him I was Chicago Rose in the first place, so I wouldn't have to go ahead doing it.

I'd just say, "I'm Penny Richards from Jefferson High School and I was sent here to take you to the Jingle Club so you could get curtains, but you can just go over and get your own curtains, I'm going home!"

And if he didn't like it, he could lump it!

So I just sat still between them on the front seat and bided my time. If Betty Lou could make any sense out of this whole thing, when I told her about it tomorrow, she was better than I was, that was all.

On the way Blitz said, "Y'nervous?"

I thought of how late it was getting to be and what a calling down I was going to get if I ever got caught sneaking in at this hour, so I admitted: "A little bit, not very much."

"Who wouldn't be?" Trigger said. "Until she gets him into the Jingle she's out-talking a thirty-eight every inch of the way, with no one to back her up. He'll drop her in a minute if he wises onto her. It's him or us, and he knows it."

Being dropped by someone I hadn't even taken up with yet wasn't going to worry me any. But like everything else they said, there wasn't any real sense to it.

They stopped finally around at the side of a great big building with a lighted glass shed over its entrance. I guessed it was another hotel; none of these people seemed to have any homes of their own.

"We're just in time," Trigger said. "That's his car waiting there, he'll be coming out in a minute."

Blitz said to me: "Y'know how y'gonna connect with him, don'tcha?" He sounded like I was a telephone

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wire. "Shoot out around the corner and let his fender throw you as soon as he turns on the ignition. You know how to work it so you won't get hurt, y'used to be in the fake-accident racket in Chi."

"No, I — " I quailed.

Trigger made that pawing gesture under his coat again.

"Just stage-fright," Blitz assured him tolerantly. "She'll be over it in a minute. All right, get out and get ready for your dive, Rose."

They stood me up between them against the building wall, just back of the corner. Trigger kept watching around it. Blitz kept hold of me by the arms. It was dark around there where we were.

Trigger gave a sudden cut of his hand. "Here he comes now."

Blitz tightened his grip, turned me around and pointed me out toward the gutter that fronted the hotel. "No," I whined.

"He's in," Trigger whispered. There was the sound of a motor turning over, out of sight around the corner. Wheels started to slither.

"Okay, you're on the air, Rose," Blitz grunted. He gave me a sudden shove out away from him, like I was a volley-ball. I went staggering out across the sidewalk trying to keep from falling flat on my face, and the big headlights of a car were coming to meet me from the side.

I couldn't stop short of the gutter; the sidewalk was too narrow; and the car and I both got there at the same time.

I remembered something he'd said about grabbing the fender, and as I went down I caught at it with both hands and lay flat on top of it instead of going under it.

The car stopped short — it had hardly begun to pick up speed anyway — and I rolled off the fender and sat down on the ground in front of it.

A man with a leathery tan face and silver hair jumped out and came running around to me. "Are you hurt, miss?" he asked, picking me up. Then when he saw I was all right, he got kind of sore. "You should look where you're going; you could have been killed."

"Somebody pushed me," I insisted tearfully. I looked over where Trigger and Blitz had been, but there wasn't anyone there any more.

The doorman, who had come over to us, growled: "Ah, they always say that, Mr. Brennan."

Brennan looked around, said: "Help me take her into the lobby a minute, Joe, before there's cops around asking a lot of questions. I don't want the papers mentioning my name and address."

They helped me in between them. I looked around over my shoulder just before we stepped through the revolving door. I wasn't sure, but I thought I could make out a slice of ice-cream-color hat-brim sticking out around the corner down there.

I sat down and rested in the lobby for a minute and the doorman brought me a glass of water. Then Brennan stood up, said: "Wait a minute, let's

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see if I can't square this with you."

I didn't know what he was talking about, and I didn't care.

He sat down over in the corner and wrote something, then came back with a scrap of light-blue paper and tried to give it to me. "Will fifty be all right?"

"Fifty what?" I said. Then when I saw that it was a check, like my father brings home sometimes, I pushed it back at him, told him politely but firmly that I wasn't allowed to take money from strangers.

He acted for a minute like he couldn't believe his ears. "How old are you?" he asked.

I was kind of tired pretending I was Chicago Rose by now; I hadn't pretended I was to him, anyway, so I didn't have to go ahead. "Sixteen and two months," I said defiantly.

He nodded to himself and murmured: "You'd have to be, to turn down money like you just did." Then he looked at me kind of skeptically. "You dress kind of old for your age. Well, if you won't take this, can I offer you a drink?"

"Yes," I said eagerly. I almost never seem to get enough refreshments.

He frowned a little and his eyes got squinty. "Come on in the bar," he said shortly.

I'd never been in one before. It was just like a soda fountain, only it didn't have faucets. He whispered something to the man behind it and then he left me sitting there.

"You go ahead," he said. "I've got a phone call to make."

The man brought two of those rotten tan things that I'd already made the mistake of tasting over at *their* place. And then he brought the most irresistible pink malted you ever saw, and left it standing by itself a couple of chairs away from me, like it didn't belong to anyone. So of course I moved off down there where it was and started in on it.

Just when I got down to where the straw was gurgling at the bottom, I turned around and Mr. Brennan was standing there without a sound watching me. "That's another way of telling," he said.

We went back in the lounge and sat down again. He asked me how I happened to be going around, at my age, all dressed up like that and with all those crayon-marks on my face.

"Well, they all went out to the movies and wouldn't take me with them," I started to explain, "so I got sore and went up to my sister's room —"

"I understand," he smiled, "just making believe, like little girls do."

I was going ahead to tell him the rest of it, how Blitz had called our house by mistake and everything, but just then I happened to get a look at a clock across the way and it said 11:25. That drove everything else out of my hand.

I jumped up and started edging away from him. "I'll have to go now, they'll be back any minute."

"Won't you stay just five minutes longer?" he urged. "I always wanted to have a little daughter of my own,

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to take her around and show her the sights. We could go some place where there's music and dancing —"

But I started to run without waiting to hear any more. Was I going to get it when I got home! I pushed out through the revolving door and then I stopped short.

Blitz was standing there down by the corner, leaning back against the wall waiting, with his hat pulled down over his face and smoking a cigarette.

I looked up the other way and Trigger was standing up *there*, waiting the same way.

They both saw me, and they both started to take a slow step toward me. But they didn't have time to finish it; I turned around and went in again as fast as I'd come out.

Mr. Brennan was still sitting there, sort of day-dreaming about having a little girl like me, I guess. I went back to him and said: "I guess I will stay a *little* while, after all."

The damage was done now anyway, the family was almost certainly home by this time. The only thing left to do was wait a little longer, until they were safely in bed and had the lights out, and *then* go back.

He brightened right up and said: "Swell! Now, it's no fun here. Let me take you some place where you'll enjoy yourself."

Then he looked at me sort of helplessly. "I don't know much about showing a little girl your age a good time. It's kind of late for amusements like parks or movies. Where would you like to go?"

I remembered that place they'd spoken of, the "Jingle." I wouldn't have suggested it if I could have thought of any other, but I couldn't, and he kept waiting to hear me say where I wanted to go, so finally in order not to seem a complete fool who didn't even know where she wanted to go herself, I mentioned it.

His eyes got that narrow look again for a minute and he said: "Have you ever been there before?"

"No," I said, "I just happened to hear somebody speak of it."

His face cleared again and he smiled. "Oh, I see, Cinderella wants to pretend she's grown up, just for one night, is that it? All right, we'll see if we can find it and we'll go there."

We went out and got in his car. This time you couldn't see a sign of Blitz or Trigger around, but when we flashed past the corner I could see that car they'd brought me in still standing there in the gloom, so I knew they weren't very far away.

I was going to tell him all about them — I really liked him much better than them by now — but he seemed so happy to be taking me out, as if I was really his daughter, that I hated to spoil his evening for him, so I decided not to. The best way to treat mean people is to ignore them, not mention them at all.

He had a little trouble finding the "Jingle," because no one seemed to have heard of it before tonight, but finally a taxi driver told us where there was a new club being opened,

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and when we finally found it it turned out to be the one, all right.

It was in a creepy sort of dead-end street, up against the river, and there was a coal truck standing there backed up against a sidewalk grate, but it hadn't dumped its load yet, was just waiting.

We drew up outside and a man with a lot of brass buttons came over and opened the car door. Brennan said, "Haven't I seen your face somewhere before?" and the man got kind of confused, but told him he must be mistaken.

Then Mr. Brennan turned and looked at me, and asked: "Are you still sure you want to go in?" I could hear music coming out, and the colored lights looked so cozy, I couldn't resist. I told him yes, I'd love to.

"Well, I couldn't be wrong about *you*," he said to himself; but out loud: "If you've got me fooled, I'm sure slipping and I deserve to be bagged." So we got out and went in.

It was small, but it had the prettiest colored bulbs strung all around, like a Christmas tree, and a few people sitting at tables all dressed up pretty, and two couples dancing.

It was the first really glamorous place I'd been in all evening, and when he saw how my eyes were shining and how thrilled I was, he sort of relaxed.

"Why does it have to be that table?" he asked, when the waiter tried to take us over to a certain one against the wall.

"That's the only one left; all the others are reserved, only the people are late getting here," the waiter said.

So we went over and sat down. The waiter asked us what we'd like to have. "Double choc'late soda," I said instantly.

Mr. Brennan sighed, "Ah, Cinderella, Cinderella, everything seems magic to your eyes."

After I'd finished my soda and we'd been sitting there a while, one of those disconnected words they'd used came back to my mind. *Ice.* But I didn't ask him for some because they'd told me to, but because I really was kind of dry and sticky. It certainly was close in there.

For a minute his face changed and he gave me that same squinty look again, and his hand even went in toward his coat, like those other people's had all the time. Then he said very quietly, "Sure, you can have some ice."

When the waiter brought it, he kept watching my face very closely, like he wanted to see what I'd say about it. Well, all I said was "Thank you," because it was just like any other ice I'd ever had. I looked at it kind of satisfied and started to crunch a piece between my teeth.

He dropped his hand down again and gave me a funny kind of a smile. "I thought you meant the other kind," he said. "I'm so used to —"

"What other kind is there?" I asked him. He seemed kind of silly.

"You wouldn't know about those things, Cinderella. But there is another kind. I've got some of it, and

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I've got a lot of green money, and there's some men I left behind me in Chicago would give their right arms to know where I've got it. I'm going to let you in on my secret, Cinderella, because I know it's safe with you."

He smiled some more. "We came here on it."

"How could we? It isn't snowy on the streets or anything."

He laughed, chucked me under the chin. "It's in the tires of the car, all packed in cotton wool."

That wasn't so terribly interesting; I couldn't see why they'd wanted to find out so bad. I was going to tell him about them, that they weren't in Chicago at all but right here, and that I'd been with them myself just before I met him; but he went ahead talking and I didn't have the chance. I've been brought up never to interrupt people until they get through.

When we first came in there'd been two couples dancing on the floor. Then after a while there was only one. Then there weren't any, but the music kept on playing.

There wasn't anyone sitting at the tables now any more either, and I hadn't even seen them get up to go. But the colored lights shone down mostly in the middle of the room, so you couldn't tell so easily what was going on around the sides.

The music kept sounding thinner and thinner, as if each time there was one less instrument, and then finally there was just one man left, picking away at the piano soft and low. Then before you knew it, he must have strolled outside to rest a while; there was silence. The waiters had disappeared too. We were the only ones left in the place. There was a lull, like when something is going to happen. I couldn't tell, because I'd never been in a lull before.

And Mr. Brennan was so taken up talking to me, he didn't seem to notice anything going on around him. I seemed to have got him into a sentimental, reminiscent mood. He was giving me his life story.

"I'm sorry now for all the laws I've broken and all the things I've done, but it's too late. If I'd married and settled down and had a sweet little girl like you for a daughter in the beginning, instead of going after the quick money —"

Then he stopped and looked at me and asked, "Am I rubbing you the wrong way, by telling you all these things about my past?"

"No —" I started to say. But that expression reminded me of something from earlier in the evening. "Mr. Brennan," I asked curiously, "excuse me for interrupting, but what does it mean when they speak about *rubbing* a person?"

"It means to kill someone. But the way I used it just now —"

My mouth opened wider than it ever had before, made a great big round O, and I put both hands at once over it.

He saw something was **the** matter. "Ah, I've frightened **you**," he said penitently. "I shouldn't have told you that."

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"Curtains," I whispered hoarsely through my hands; "what do curtains mean?"

"Curtains mean a person's end."

"Mr. Brennan, you've got to listen to me!" And I told him the whole thing, everything that had happened from the time Blitz first rang our house by mistake, until they'd pushed me in front of his car.

"I didn't mean to do it!" I whimpered. "I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what they meant, until you told me just now!"

For a minute he was altogether different. He was like they were, mouth all twisted and white, eyes hard as buttons.

"So they've got me sewed up, have they, thanks to you?" His hand went in under his coat. "Well, I'll go — but I'm gonna take you with me."

"Where to?" I asked wonderingly. "We can't get out —"

He sighed, and little by little his face went back to what it had been like before. He shook his head a little sadly.

"No, I guess you didn't know," he said. "Such thickness couldn't be faked; it must be the McCoy.

"Listen, Cinderella, I've got to go anyway; but they'll let you through. You get up and slowly walk away from the table, like you hadn't just told me.

"I won't give you away, I'll act like nothing was the matter. They might get tired waiting and give it to you with me, if we both sit here much longer."

"But that's the signal, it'll begin the minute I do that." I swallowed hard, but I wouldn't budge. "No," I said, "I didn't mean to, but I brought you in here. I'm not going to get up and walk away. I'm going to stay here at the table with you. They'll — they'll have to rub us both, I guess."

"But aren't you scared?"

"Oh, awfully," I whispered.

His hand dropped back to his lap again. "You saved yourself that time," he said. "I would have dropped you before you got a foot away, if you'd taken me up on it. But now I see that you're on the level. That's the last time tonight I doubt you. I guess it's the last time tonight for anything."

We didn't say anything for a minute or two. It was awfully quiet in there; you could hear a pin drop. I had a creepy feeling like eyes were watching me, but I couldn't tell where they were coming from. After a while I asked, "Will it hurt much?"

"We're probably good for another few minutes sitting here," he said, "so let's think this out. Don't look around, Cinderella, just bend your head like you were listening, and I was talking to you like I was before."

"And don't talk too loud," I warned him under my breath. "Another thing I forgot to tell you, there's a hole right over us in the ceiling and one of them's up there."

His eyes didn't go up at all. He just took out a very shiny cigarette case and looked at the inside of the lid while he helped himself to one, then he put it away again.

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"Yeah, there is," he said quietly. "I can see the rim of a gat-muzzle pointing down through it, right into the middle of my brain."

He took a careless puff and went on: "Now Cinderella, the lights are our only chance. This place was rigged up in a hurry, just for tonight. The wiring is all strung around on the outside of the walls, not covered up; see it? It must be plugged into a master outlet at one certain place, this whole circuit of colored bulbs. Let me see if I can find where that is, first of all."

His eyes roamed around indifferently like he didn't have a thought in his mind. "Talk to me," he said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Three times three is nine," I pattered desperately, "four times three is twelve, five times three —"

The family didn't seem so awful to me right then; I was wishing I was back with them. But I couldn't get up and go. They'd shoot him.

"I've found it," he said. "Porcelain too, like I hoped. Now I've got to hit it squarely with just one shot, and blow the whole place to darkness. I've got to have a chance to draw and sight. Are you afraid of the noise of a gun, right up against your face?"

"I never heard one before."

"Then lean over me, from across the table, and pretend to be taking a cinder out of my eye. I'm gonna try to aim and fire with your body covering me, so they won't see me unlimber.

"Now listen close, Cinderella. I don't think we can make it, but at least we'll take a try. Throw yourself flat on the floor and crawl along it the minute the lights go. Don't lift your head an inch, but *swim* for it. You're young and supple, you ought to be able to move fast even that way.

"There's no use trying to get out the front way, into the street. That's where they'll expect us to head for and that's where they'll point their fire. I'll hold mine after that first shot, to keep from showing them where we are.

"We'll make for the back. There must be stairs back there some place, leading up into the building over us. We'll try to get up through it and over the roof.

"Turn your head slow and place the direction you're going in, for yourself, while you still can see. It's that middle opening in the shadows back there, between the dummy phone booth and the swinging door.

"And if you once get out okay, don't wait for me. Hotfoot it all the way up, as high as you can go."

Then he said, "Are you ready, Cinderella?"

"I'm ready," I said, clenching my two hands down at my sides.

He smiled to give me courage. "Then here we go, Cinderella."

He blinked his eye and pretended he'd got something in it. I leaned over him, pretending to help him get it out. Once I happened to glance down, and he had a big monster of a black gun out in his hand, wedged between the two of us, right under my chin. It was turned out, toward where that main light-plug was.

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The last thing he said was, "In closer, Cinderella; there's someone over us too, don't forget."

So I leaned as close to him as I could, and by then I was nearly crying.

Something went *boom* right under my face like a lot of dynamite, and all the lights went out. I didn't have to drop like he told me to. I got such a fright when the thing went off right under me, I fell all the way over backwards, flat on the floor.

So then I just rolled over and started wriggling fast toward where I'd last seen that back door.

I heard the table we'd been at go over with a crash, and one of the little pieces of ice that had been on it hit me on the back of the neck and made me go even faster.

Meanwhile, the whole place was full of starry flashes, like there was a terrific lightning storm going on.

They came from all over — from behind the bar, from the telephone booth, from the front door, and even from the ceiling.

I heard Blitz' voice suddenly yell in from somewhere outside: "Get her too, you guys, she's ratted on us!"

I was nearly over at the back door by now. I was glad that dress of Fran's I'd borrowed was black and didn't show up in the flashes that kept streaking around me. I couldn't tell what had happened to Mr. Brennan, whether he was down on the floor or flat up against the wall somewhere.

And then suddenly my head and shoulders wedged in between somebody's straddled legs. He was standing there with his feet spread out, firing over me toward the front doorway.

I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. I grabbed hold of a leg with both hands, pushed with all my might to try to shove it out of the way. It kicked up in the air, somebody yelled and fell over on the floor right next to me with his whole weight.

Then I stood up, ran into the door with my hands out in front of me to guide me, flung it open and ran out into a back hall. It wasn't much lighter than in there where we'd been, except for a tiny point of flickering flame over a wall gas-jet.

But at the end of it I saw a flight of stairs and I ran toward them for all I was worth and started up without waiting for him, like he'd told me to.

I went up one whole flight, and around the landing, and halfway up the next flight; and then I stopped and stood there in the gloom, listening and leaning over to see if he was coming. My heart was going so fast it nearly made as much noise as all that shooting down there.

Suddenly he came out, backwards and crouched over low, and just before he backed away from the door he fired once into the dark, smoking room behind it.

Then he turned and sprinted as far as the foot of the stairs, and there he turned and crouched and fired again, to keep them back, because they'd seen him go and were trying to come out after him.

While he was standing there like

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that, with his back to the stairs, a shadow suddenly came out onto the landing between him and me — I guess the one that had been planted at the hole in the ceiling over us — and I caught the glint of a gun, raised and all ready in his hand. He pointed it square down at Brennan, at the back of his head.

There wasn't even time to yell a warning to Brennan, because by the time he turned to look up at me it would have been too late.

Somebody had left a pailful of garbage standing there on the step below me. I grabbed it up with both hands and flung it down there at the landing where he was with all my might.

I didn't even aim it, I was just lucky I guess. It hit him right in the side of the head and keeled him over sideways, and the gun went off into the ceiling, and eggshells and dirty vegetables poured all over him.

Brennan turned and looked up. "Good work, Cinderella!" he yelled. Then he came running up, and stooped and snatched the gun up without stopping as he went by. He caught up with me, grabbed me by the hand, and started to tow me along with him.

They kept firing as they came up after us, but they couldn't get us in a straight line, because the stairs broke direction every flight and turned back on themselves.

When he'd finished using all the shots in his own gun, he threw it down at their heads and used the one he'd taken from the other man.

We got up to the roof door finally. It was locked, but he fired a shot at it and blew it open, and then we were out on the roof, running across it.

We skimmed over a low partition ridge between the two buildings and got to the skylight hutch of the other house. They'd come out after us by now and were firing at us from the first roof door. You could hear little things like wasps go humming by your ears.

The hutch here was locked like the other, but this time he couldn't blow it open because the padlock was on the inside.

"I'll get it," he panted, "the wood's rotten. Grab me by the coat if it caves in."

He backed up and took a run at the door, and crashed his whole shoulder into it. It shot in, and if I hadn't grabbed him by the tail of the coat like he'd said, he would have gone down the whole flight of stairs inside.

He swung around and hit the side of the framework. Then he righted himself and we started down through the new house. A lock of my hair fell off, like something had snipped it loose.

A minute later they got to the roof door we'd just come in by, and started firing down at us from up there. But again the zigzagging of the stairs saved us.

And then, just as we'd got halfway down through the house and it looked like we'd be out in the street in another minute, a shot came up at us from *below*.

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We both staggered to a stop and looked over the rail. Faces were grinning up at us from below, more of *their* faces. Some of them had been told by the others what we were trying to do, and had come in from the street to head us off. They had us blocked.

Another shot came up through the little sliver of opening, and we both snatched our heads back.

"A whole army," he said bitterly, "just to get one man and a girl!"

"Everyone in there was in on it," I told him. "I heard them say so; waiters and musicians and all."

We couldn't go back either; the others were coming down behind us from the roof.

"Quick!" he said. "See if they'll let us in one of these flats here; it's our only chance."

I turned away from the stairs and ran down the long hall pounding at door after door with the flat of my hands.

"Open! Help us! Let us in — oh, *please* let us in!"

He stayed behind there on the landing to keep them back a little longer.

I could hear people behind some of the doors, but they were too scared to open up, on account of all the firing that had been going on for the past ten minutes or more.

Frightened voices jabbered back at me, "Go away! Leave us alone!" And I heard one woman saying frantically — I guess she had a phone in there with her — "Quick, send over all the men you have. There's something terrible going on — two people being murdered here in the halls."

"Shoot in one of the locks — *make* them —" I pleaded to Brennan.

Something made a clicking sound in his hand. "I have no more left," he said, and he aimed at someone's head coming up, but with the back part of his gun, and then pitched it like a baseball.

There was only one more door left and then the hall ended, and then they'd just come into that corner-pocket after us and shoot us down, slow, over and over and over.

I rained slaps all up and down this door, and all of a sudden it swung in loose; the flat behind it must have been vacant.

"Brennan!" I squealed. "Here!"

And I jumped in there, into the dark. A minute later he scuffed down the hall, turned in after me, and got the door closed on the two of us.

The shooting out on the stairs stopped, and you could hear feet slithering along the hall toward where we were. And in the sudden stillness I heard Blitz' voice say: "It's all right, take y'time, boys. We've got them now, he's out of slugs."

Brennan said: "See if there's a fire escape outside any of those windows behind us. I'll hold the door against them until you get down."

I ran from one to the other, flattening my nose against the grimy panes, swallowing dust and cobwebs, peering down. I didn't find one until I'd gone two empty rooms away.

I tugged at the warped window

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until I'd got it up. A shot thudded in there where he was, sounding like it came through wood or something.

I turned away from the window and ran back to him through the dark. "Hurry up, I've found one!"

"Too late, Cinderella," he grunted. He was still holding the door, but he was sagging lower on it now. "Quick, get down it, I still can hold this —"

"I'm not going to leave you up here," I said. "I like you too much for that."

"Game little Cinderella," he coughed.

Then the door swept back, carrying him with it, and about five or six of them walked in, one behind the other. They were just black silhouettes first, against the hall light.

Blitz' voice said, "Bring a light."

Someone turned on a flashlight and shone it on Brennan, making a big moon against the wall for him to die in. Blitz looked down at him where he was lying against the baseboard, and he took careful aim and fired.

Brennan jolted against the baseboard as if a nail had gone into him. I screamed and ran at Blitz, but they caught me and threw me back.

"That's for dishing us out of our share of the Chicago racket money. Now, where is it?"

Brennan just smiled sleepily.

"All right, you Rose, did he tell you where it is?" They pulled me forward again and threw me at him, and switched the light on me.

"I'm not Rose and I never was!"

"We know that now and it's your tough luck. But did he tell you where the haul is?"

Brennan's voice said brokenly from somewhere in the dark: "Tell them I did, Cinderella."

"Yes," I said into the dazzling torchlight.

"Out with it then, hurry up! Where is it?"

I waited, listening. Brennan's weak gasp came again. "Don't tell them yet — hear me? Hold out as long as you can, they won't touch you as long as —"

He was trying to save my life.

Blitz snarled, "We'll see how long she can hold out!"

He grabbed my arm, wrenched it up behind my back until I thought I'd nearly faint. I went crashing down on my knees, pinned to him backwards.

Brennan's voice pleaded, "Don't — don't — promise to let the kid go and I'll tell you —"

One of them warned Blitz excitedly, "Come on, we gotta get outta here, don't you realize that?"

"Not until I put one into this interfering brat!" he raged. He let go of me and I tumbled forward on my face and rocked there on the floor, rubbing at my shoulder, looking around at him.

I saw his arm stretch out toward me, and the torch caught the gun at the end of it and made it shine.

I could hear Brennan trying to reason with them, but I was listening for the sound of the shot, not his voice.

The flash came from too far back

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behind Blitz, way back in the hallway. Blitz went up on his toes first and seemed to get twice as tall as he was, then he started to come down on me, leaning over more and more, and finally he fell flat right on top of me and pinned me there.

For a minute a puff of hot breath stirred my hair, and then it stopped and didn't come again.

They must have made the mistake, Blitz' gang, of all crowding into the room around us, to watch and hear what went on, and left the street doorway and the stairs unguarded.

For a minute or two the whole thing started over again, just like before; flashes everywhere and thunder and feet running in all directions trying to get out. I wound my arms tight around my head and buried my face in them.

It didn't last as long as the first time; it ended right away. Lights came in, and there were heavy thuds as guns dropped to the floor.

I raised my head and saw some of them standing with their hands up. Some more came in that way from the other room, with policemen behind them.

Someone was lying still on the floor in there; I could see his feet sticking out.

A policeman's face bent down close and peered at me. "She's just a kid!" he gasped in surprise.

"Mister," I begged weakly, "will you please get this man off me so I can get up?"

"Didje get them all?" somebody asked. "How about the two that got down the fire escape?"

"They're both lying down there in the backyard, now. The first one missed his footing and pulled down a whole section of the rusty thing with him. The second one just went down clean —"

They were bending over Brennan, and I heard him whispering: "— it's all in the tires of my car, just slit them. I know I got no right to ask you boys favors, but let the kid go home, she's just a little school kid."

Then they told me he wanted to say something to me. I bent down close by him. I could hardly hear him, he whispered so low.

"— always wanted to have a little girl of my own like you —"

Then his face sort of turned empty. I looked at them, not understanding, and one of them said quietly, "He's gone, Cinderella."

I started to cry. I'd only known him a little while, but I'd liked him a lot and it felt like I'd known him a long time.

They didn't let me go straight home, though, even after Brennan had asked them to. First, they took me downtown with them some place, and I had to answer a lot of questions.

Even then they weren't sure whether they ought to let me go home or not, until one of them, who seemed to be the boss of all the others, happened to hear me say I went to Thomas Jefferson High School.

"I got a daughter goes there too."

"What's her name?" I asked.

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He told me, and then he wanted to know, "Know her?"

Did I? "She sits right next to me in French class!" I gasped.

"I don't suppose your family would like it if they heard about you getting mixed up in a thing like this," he murmured thoughtfully.

"I'll probably never hear the end of it," I admitted.

"Will you promise me you'll never dress up like this again and go roaming around?" he wanted to know.

"Will I!" I exclaimed fervently.

He turned to the others around him, and I heard him say under his breath, "Let's send the kid home and keep her name out of it. Her deposition is just as valid if presented by proxy, and we've got the rest of those guys to sweat it out of. I know I wouldn't like it if it was my own kid."

So they called a motorcycle policeman up to the front door, and I told him where I lived and climbed on behind him, and we went skittering away.

When we got out to the house, I climbed down and hobbled across the sidewalk to our front door. "What's the matter with your foot?" the policeman wanted to know. He looked sympathetic.

"I lost one of my slippers on those tenement stairs, but I never noticed it until now."

"If that don't beat everything!" he said, slapping his handlebar. "Just like she did in the storybook!"

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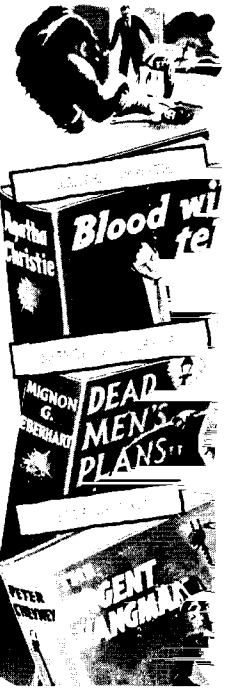

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